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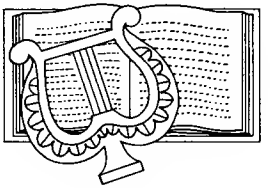

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"BONES AND I"

OR

THE SKELETON AT HOME

BY

G. J. WHYTE-MELVILLE

AUTHOR OF "THE GLADIATORS," "CERISE," "DIGBY GRAND," ETC.

THIRTEENTH THOUSAND

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"BONES AND I;"

OR,

THE SKELETON AT HOME.

INTRODUCTION.

LONG ago, visiting the monastery of La Trappe, I was struck with the very discontented appearance of its inmates. In some of their faces, indeed, I detected no expression whatever, but on none could I perceive the slightest gleam of satisfaction with their lot. No wonder: few men are of the stuff that makes a good recluse. The human animal is naturally gregarious, like the solan goose, the buffalo, the

monkey, or the mackerel. Put him by himself, he pines for lack of mental aliment, just as a flower fades for want of daylight in the dark. A multitude of fools forms an inspiriting spectacle, a solitary specimen becomes a sad and solemn warning. If the Trappists, who are not entirely isolated from their kind, thus wither under the rigour of those repressive rules enjoined by the Order, what must have been the condition of such hermits and anchorites as passed whole months, and even years together, in the wilderness, unvisited by anything more human than the distempered phantoms of their dreams? No shave, no wash, no morning greeting, and no evening wine. How many, I wonder, preserved their sanity in the ordeal? how many, returning dazed and bewildered to the haunts of men, tottered about in helpless, wandering, maundering imbecility? Were there not some hard, boisterous ma-

tures who plunged wildly into the excesses of a world so long forsworn, with all the appetite of abstinence, all the reckless self-abandonment of the paid-off man-of-war's man on a spree? No; few people are qualified for recluses. I am proud to be amongst the number.

I live in a desert, but my desert is in the very heart of London. The waste is all round me though; I have taken good care of that. Once, indeed, it blossomed like the rose, for a thousand fertilizing streams trickled through its bright expanse. Do not you as I did. I turned all the streams into one channel, "in the sweet summer-time long ago," and "sat by the river," like those poor fools in the song, and said, "Go to! Now I shall never thirst again!" But in the night there came a landslip from the upper level, and choked the river, turning its course through my neighbour's pastures,

so that the meadows, once so green and fresh, are bare and barren now for evermore. I speak in parables of course; and the value of "this here obserwation," like those of Captain Bunsby, "lies in the application of it." I need not observe, the street in which I hide myself is a *cul de sac*. A man who sells chickweed, perhaps I should say, who would sell chickweed if he could, is the only passenger. Of the houses on each side of me, one is unfinished, the other untenanted. Over the way, I confront the dead wall at the back of an hospital. Towards dusk in the late autumn, when the weather is breaking, I must admit the situation is little calculated to generate over-exuberance of animal spirits. Sequestered, no doubt, shady too, particularly in the short days, and as remote from the noise or traffic of the town as John o' Groat's house, but enlivening—No.

On first beginning to reside here, I confess I felt at times a little lonely and depressed. Therefore I brought home "Bones" to come and live with me. And who *is* "Bones?" Ah! that is exactly what I have never been able to find out. Contemplative, affable, easily pleased, and an admirable listener, he is yet on some points reserved to a degree that might almost be termed morose; while in his personal appearance there is a dignity of bearing, an imposing presence, which forbids the most intimate associate to attempt a liberty.

I will describe him, as I see him at this moment, reclining in an easy attitude on the cushions of my favourite arm-chair, benevolently interested, it would seem, in my lightest movements, while I sit smoking silently by the fire. Neither of us are great talkers quite so early in the evening.

He is a well-formed and very complete skeleton of middle height—perfect in every respect, and in all his articulations, with the exception of two double teeth absent from the upper jaw. The arch of his lower ribs is peculiarly symmetrical, and his vertebræ are put in with a singular combination of flexibility and strength. As I look at him now leaning back in a graceful attitude, with one thigh-bone thrown carelessly over the other, he reminds me of so many people I knew when I lived in the world, that I seem to fancy myself once more a denizen of that revolving purgatory which goes by the name of general society Poor A—— was almost as fleshless, B—— much more taciturn, and C—— decidedly not so good-looking. "Bones," however, possesses a quality that I have never found in any other companion. His tact is beyond praise. Under no circumstances does he become a

bore—that is why we get on so admirably together. Like a ghost, he speaks only when spoken to. Unlike a wife, refrains from monopolizing the last word. If he didn't rattle so on the slightest movement —a fault of anatomy, indeed, rather than temper—as a companion he would be—perfection.

It is a dull, close evening. Were it not so near winter one might predict a thunderstorm. The smoke from my meerschaum winds upwards in thin blue wreaths, uninfluenced by a breath of outward air, though the windows are open to the deserted street, black and silent as the grave. My lamp is not yet lit (we both affect a congenial gloom), the fire is burning out, but there is a dull red glow like a fever-spot lowering under a volcanic arch of cinders; and looking into it with unwinking eyes, I see the long-drawn, weary, beaten road that leads

backward through a life. I see a child set down to run alone, half-frightened, laughing, trusting, almost happy, and altogether gay. I see a youth, bold, healthful, courageous, full of an impossible chivalry, a romantic generosity that delights to lavish no matter what—money, love, hope, happiness, coining heart and intellect into gold that he may squander it on the passers-by. I see a strong man crushed—a proud head grovelling in the dust, a high spirit broken, a cowering wretch imploring that his punishment may be lightened ever such a little, trembling and wincing like a slave beneath the scourge. At this moment the fire falls in with a crash, while a pale yellow flame leaps flickering out of the midst, and starting from my seat to light our lamp for the rest of the evening, I demand aloud, "What then is the purpose of Creation? From a quenched rushlight to an extinct volcano,

from the squeak of a mouse to yesterday's leading article, from a mite smothered in a cheese to an Emperor murdered in Mexico, is the march of Time but the destructive progress of a bull in a china-shop? Are the recurring centuries but so many ciphers added to the sum of a thriftless, objectless expenditure? Is the so-called economy of the universe but an unbridled, haphazard course of boundless and incalculable waste?"

His backbone creaks uncomfortably while he moves in his chair. "Waste?" he repeats in the hushed, placid tones that make him so invaluable as a companion—"Waste? The subject is by no means limited. I have some experience in it of my own. Would you favour me with your ideas?"—and I go off at score with—

CHAPTER I.

"ON WASTE."

WHY are these things so? I exclaim, plumping down again into my seat. "Why have the times been out of joint ever since Hamlet's first appearance on the stage, with black tights and rosettes in his shoes? Why is the whole world still at sixes and sevens? What is the object of it all? *Cui bono? cui bono? cui bono?* Is there the slightest appearance of a result? any tendency towards a goal? Shall we ever get *anywhere*, or are we travelling perpetually in a circle, like

squirrels in a cage, convicted pickpockets on the treadmill? By the way, who convicted the pickpockets, and sentenced them? The sitting magistrate, of course; and do the awards of that worthy functionary produce any definite result in the direction of good order and morality, or must his daily incubation too be wasted upon addled eggs? Do you remember the story of the man who cut his throat because he was so tired of dressing and undressing every day? Don't shake your head—I beg pardon, your skull —you told it me yourself. I can appreciate his prejudices, but how did he know there might not be buttons and buttonholes where he was going? That is, supposing he went anywhere—if he didn't, he was wasted altogether. If he did, perhaps he was of no use when he got there. Wasted again—only a human life after all. Not much when you think of it amongst the millions that

cling about this old globe of ours, rising, swarming, disappearing like the maggots on a dead horse, but of no light importance to the bearer when you remember its weight of sorrows, anxieties, disappointments, and responsibilities, not to mention the Black Care sitting heavily at the top to keep the whole burden in its place. Life is a bubble, they say. Very well—but is it blown from a soap-dish by a schoolboy, rising heaven-ward, tinted with rainbow hues, to burst only when at its most beautiful and its best? or is it not rather a bubble gurgling to the surface from the agonized lungs of some struggling wretch drowning far below in the dark, pitiless water,

'Unknell'd, uncoffin'd, and unknown?'

—Wasted, too, unless the fish eat him, and then who knows? none of us perhaps may ever eat the fish.

"Listen to me. I won't make your flesh

creep, for unanswerable reasons. I don't even think I shall freeze the marrow in your bones. I could tell you some strange stories, but I dare say your own experiences are more remarkable than mine. I will only ask you to reflect on the amount of suffering that came under our daily notice when we lived in the world, and say whether every pang of mind or body, every tear shed or swallowed down, every groan indulged or repressed, were anything but sheer waste? Can you not recall a hundred instances of strength sapped by drink, of intellect warped by madness, of beauty fading under neglect, or withered by disappointment? Here a pair of lives are wasted because they must needs run out their course in different grooves—there two more are utterly thrown away, because, encompassed in a golden link, they can by no means shake themselves free The fairest of all, it may be,

and the most promising, never blooms into perfection for want of its congenial comrade (wasted too, perhaps, at the antipodes), and failing thus to reach maturity, dwindles, dwarfed and unmated, to the grave. Think of Beauty wasted on the Beast—the Beast, too, utterly out of his element, that he must roll on the garden sward rather than labour in the teeming furrow Look at Hercules spell-bound in the lap of Omphale, broad-fronted Antony enervated by black-browed Cleopatra. Consider the many Messrs. Caudle who lavish as much good-humour as would set up a dozen households on their legal nightmares, and do not forget poor Miss Prettyman pining in lonely spinsterhood over the way. See the mother training up her child, impressing on him, far more forcibly than she feels them for herself, lessons of honour, truth, probity, and the unspeakable blessing of faith—praying

her heart out for that wilful little urchin, night and morning on her knees. A good Christian with humble hopes of heaven, does she know that, far more lavishly than those heathen termagants in hell, she is pouring water in a sieve? Does she know she may live to see that smooth, soft, wondering brow scored deep with sorrow, or lowering black with sin—that round rosy cheek hollowed by depravity, or bloated with excess? Worst of all, the merry, guileless heart embittered by falsehood, and hardened with ill-usage till it has ceased to feel for others, even for itself! Great Heaven! have we not seen them — these simple, honest, manly hearts, taken by some soft-eyed demon with loving ways, and sweet, angelic smile, to be kept carefully, to be watched jealously, till their fabric has been thoroughly studied, then broken deftly and delicately, yet with such nice art that they

can never mend again, and so, politely 'Returned, with thanks?'

"Forgive me: on such anatomical outrages I have no right to expect you should feel so warmly as myself.

"Millions of creatures, beautiful exceedingly, scour over the desert plains of explored Africa; in its unknown regions, millions more may be supposed to feed, and gambol, and die. What is the use of them? If you come to that, what was the use of the Emperor Theodore, or the King of the Cannibal Islands, or any other potentate who remains utterly unimpressed when we threaten 'to break off diplomatic relations?'

"Myriads of insects wheel about us in the sun's declining rays every summer's evening. Again, what is the use of them? What is the use of the dragon-fly, the bumble-bee, the speckled toad, the blue-nosed monkey, the unicorn, the wild

elephant,—or, indeed, the Ojibbeway Indians?"

Here, contrary to his custom, "Bones" interrupted me in full career.

"One moment," said he, with his courteous grin. Allow me to point out that yours is inadmissible, as being simply an *argumentum ad absurdum*. It would hold equally good with Léotard, Mr. Beales, or any other public exhibitor—nay, you might advance it for suppression of the Lord Mayor or the Archbishop of Canterbury."

He bowed reverentially while he mentioned the last-named dignitary; and I confess I was inclined to admit the truth of his remark.

"Then I waive the question," I replied, "as regards the brute creation, though I think I could find something to say, too, about the weasel sucking rabbits, the heron

gobbling fish, the hawk striking its quarry, or the hounds running into their fox. But we will suppose that the whole animal world, from the angler's lob-worm to the costermonger's donkey, is enjoying its paradise *here*, and return to our own kind, their sorrows, their sufferings, and natural consequence of sorrow and suffering, their sins."

He shook his skull gently, and muttered something in his spinal vertebræ about "a cart" and "a horse," but I took no notice, and proceeded with dignity—

"I have learnt my Latin Grammar, and almost the only one of its precepts I have not forgotten impresses on me that—

'Spades turn up wealth, the stimulant of crime.'

I suppose you will not dispute that the root of all evil is money?"

"Most emphatically," he exclaimed, and

his articulations rattled with startling vehemence. "Most emphatically I deny the position. A man may roll in wealth and be none the worse for it. On the contrary, poverty, but for the unremitting labour it demands, would be far more conducive to crime than a sufficiency, or even a superfluity of means. No; the real enemy with whom every man has to contend confronts him in the morning at his glass, and sticks persistently to him throughout the day The source of most unhappiness, the cause of all ill-doing, the universal origin of evil, is *not* money, but self——"

"You mean selfishness," I retorted; "and I am surprised to hear a man of the world —I mean of the *other* world, or, indeed, of *any* world whatever — assert so obvious a fallacy. Just as the liver, and not the heart, is the seat of our real well-being, so I maintain that self-indulgence, and not self-sacri-

fice, is the origin, the main-spring, the motive power of all effort, progress, improvement, moral, social, and physical. Researches of science, triumphs of art, master-pieces of genius,—what are these but results of the same instinct that directs the bee to the flower-garden, the vulture to the carcase? To eat is the first necessity of man. He labours that he may live. Grant this, as you cannot but concede the position to be unassailable, and you talk to me in vain of sentiment, philanthropy, benevolence, all the loathsome affectations of sympathy with which the earth-worm tries to impose upon its kind. A man begins by being honest. Why? Because without honesty, down the particular groove in which he spins, he cannot earn his daily bread. When he has enough of this and to spare, he turns his attention to decent apparel, a commodious house, a general appearance of respectability;

that is, he aims at being respectable—in other words, at imposing on those who have been less successful in the universal scramble than himself. Soon he buys a warming-pan, a Dutch oven, china ornaments for his chimneypiece, and the History of the Prodigal to hang about his walls. By degrees, as wealth increases, he moves into a larger residence, he rolls upon wheels, he replaces the china ornaments with a French clock; the Prodigal Son with modern oil-paintings, and hides the warming-pan in the housemaid's closet upstairs. About this period he begins to subscribe to charitable institutions, to give away what he does not want, to throw little pellets of bread at the monster who is always famished and always roaring out of doors, lest it should come in, and snatch the roast beef off his table. Some day a team of black horses with nodding plumes, and a red-nosed driver, come to take him away,

'very much respected,' and, forgive the personality, there is an end of him, as far as *we* are concerned. Will you tell me that man's life has not been a continual concession to self?—waste, waste, utter waste, from the pap-boat that preserved his infancy, to the brass-nailed coffin that protects his putridity from contact with the earth to which he returns? Why his very virtues, as he called them, were but payments, so to speak, keeping up the insurance for his own benefit, which he persuaded himself he had effected on the other world.

"Now, supposing the pap-boat had been withheld, or the nurse had tucked him into his cradle upside down, or—thus saving some harmless woman a deal of inconvenience and trouble—supposing he had never been born at all, would he have been missed, or wanted? Would not the world have gone on just as well without him? Has not his whole ex-

istence been a mistake? The food he ate, the clothes he wore, the house he lived in—were not these simply wasted? His efforts were waste, his wear-and-tear of body and mind were waste, above all, his sorrows and his sufferings were sheer, unpardonable waste. Yes; here I take my stand. I leave you every enjoyment to be found in creation, physical, moral, and intellectual. I make you a present of the elephant wallowing in his mud-bath, and the midge wheeling in the sun; I give you Juliet at her window, and Archimedes in his study; but I reserve the whale in her death-flurry, and the worm on its hook. I appeal to Jephthah sorrowing for his darling, and Rachel weeping for her children. I repeat, if that self-care, which indeed constitutes our very identity, be the object of existence, then all those tearful eyes that blur the light of every rising sun —all those aching hearts that long only for

night to be eternal—are but so many witnesses to the predominance in creation of a lavish and unaccountable waste."

Like many thoughtful and deliberate natures, I am persuaded that in early life "Bones" must have been a snuff-taker. He affects a trick of holding his fleshless finger and thumb pressed together and suspended in air, before he delivers himself of an opinion, that can only have originated in a practice he has since been compelled, for obvious reasons, to forego. Pausing during several seconds in this favourite attitude, he sank gravely back in his chair, and replied—

"False logic, my good friend. False premises, and a false conclusion. I deny them all; but the weather, even in *my* light attire, feels somewhat too close for wordy warfare. Besides, I hold with you, that an ounce of illustration is worth a pound of argument.

I will ask you, therefore, as I know you have been in Cheshire, High Leicestershire, and other cattle-feeding countries, whether you ever watched a dairymaid making a cheese? If so, you must have observed how strong and pitiless a pressure is required to wring the moisture out of its very core. My friend, the human heart is like a cheese! To be good for anything, the black drop must be wrung out of it, however tight the squeeze required, however exquisite the pain. Therefore it is, that we so often see the parable of the poor man's ewe lamb enacted in daily life. One, having everything the world can bestow, is nevertheless further endowed with that which his needy brother would give all the rest of the world to possess. For the first, the pressure has not yet been put on, though his time, too, may come by-and-by. For the second, that one darling hope, it may be, represents the little black drop left,

and so it must be wrung out, though the heart be crushed into agony in the process. You talk of suffering being pure waste; I tell you it is all pure gain. You talk of self as the motive to exertion; I tell you it is the abnegation of self which has wrought out all that is noble, all that is good, all that is useful, nearly all that is ornamental in the world. Shut the house-door on him, and the man must needs go forth to work in the fields. It is not the dreamer wrapped in his fancied bliss, from whom you are to expect heroic efforts, either of mind or body. You must dig your goad into the ox to make him use his latent strength; you must drive your spurs into the horse to get out of him his utmost speed. Wake the dreamer roughly —drive spurs and goad into his heart. He will wince and writhe, and roll and gnash his teeth, but I defy him to lie still. He must up and be doing, from sheer torture,

flying to one remedy after another till he gets to work, and so finds distraction, solace, presently comfort, and, after a while, looking yet higher, hope, happiness, and reward.

"Self, indeed! He is fain to forget self, because that therewith is bound up so much, it would drive him mad to remember; and thus sorrow-taught, he merges his own identity in the community of which he is but an atom, taking his first step, though at a humble and immeasurable distance, in the sacred track of self-sacrifice, on which, after more than eighteen hundred years, the foot-prints are still fresh, still ineffaceable. Waste, forsooth! Let him weep his heart out if he will! I tell you that the deeper the furrows are scored, the heavier shall be the harvest, the richer the garnered grain. I tell you, not a tear falls but it fertilizes some barren spot, from which hereafter shall come up the

fresh verdure of an eternal spring in that region

> 'Where there's fruit in the gardens of heaven, from the hope that on earth was betrayed;
> Where there's rest for the soul, life-wearied, that hath striven, and suffered, and prayed.'

"I'm rather tired. I won't discuss the question any further. I'll go back into my cupboard, if you please. Good-night!"

CHAPTER II.

THROUGH THE MILL.

MOST people are ashamed of their skeletons, hiding them up in their respective cupboards as though the very ownership were a degradation — alluding to them, perhaps, occasionally in the domestic circle, but ignoring them utterly before the world—a world that knows all about them the while,—that has weighed their skulls, counted their ribs, and can tell the very recesses in which they are kept. Now, in my opinion, to take your skeleton out and air him on occasion, is very good for both of you. It brings him to his

proper dimensions, which are apt to become gigantic if he is hidden too scrupulously in the dark, and it affords opportunities for comparison with other specimens of the same nature entertained by rival proprietors in the line. If I kept mine, as some do, in close confinement, I should be in a continual fidget about his safety; above all, I should dread his breaking out at untoward seasons, when he was least expected, and least desired. But "Bones and I" have no cause to be ashamed of each other. There is no disgrace nor discomfort attached to either of us in our cheerful companionship. He is good enough to express satisfaction with his present lodging, and even affirms that he finds it airy and commodious, as compared with his last; while it is a real pleasure to me, living as I do so much alone, to have a quiet, intelligent companion, with whom I can discuss the different phases of existence, speculative and

real,—the sower who never reaps—the fools who are full of bread, roses for one, thorns for another; here over-ripe fruit, there grapes sour, though by no means out of reach; successful bows drawn at a venture, well-aimed shafts that never attain the mark, impossible hopes, unavailing regrets—the baseless mirage of the Future, and the barren reality of the Past.

It was colder last night. The wind was getting up in those fitful howls which denote the commencement of a two-days' gale; veering besides from east by north to east north east. So we made fast the shutters, stirred the fire, and drew our chairs in for a comfortable chat. Something in the sound of that waking blusterer out of doors recalled to me, I know not why, the image of a good ship, many long years ago, beating on the wide Atlantic against a head-wind, that seemed to baffle her the more

for every plunge she made. No steam had she to help her struggle against the elements; tough hemp, patched canvas, and spars as yet unsprung, were all her reliance; and these strained, flapped, and creaked to some purpose while she battled foot by foot to lie her course. Again I seemed to watch the dark wave race by our quarter, with its leaping crest of foam, the trickling deck, the battened hold, the diving bowsprit, the dripping spars, the soaking canvas, with its row of reef-points like the notes on a music-score. And the grey, sullen curtain of mist and rain, walking on the waters, nearer, nearer, till it dashed its needle-pointed drops into my face. Again I looked admiringly on the men at the wheel, with their pea-jackets, glazed hats, sea-going mits, keen, wary glances, and minute wrinkles about the eyes. Again I heard the pleasant voice of the bravest, cheeriest skipper

that ever stood five feet two, and weighed fifteen stone, while he accosted me with his "Dirty weather, sir, and looks sulky to windward still. Makes her drive piles, as we say, and speak Spanish about the bows; but she behaves beautifully! Bless you, she likes it! Yes, I expect we shall have it hotter and heavier too, after sundown. A head-wind, no doubt. I've just been jotting off the reckoning; you'll find the chart below, in my cabin. We've made a longer leg than common on the starboard tack. I've left a pencil-mark at the exact spot where we went about Steady, men (this to the glazed hats)! Luff, and be d——d to you! Can't ye see it coming?"

So I went below and conned the captain's chart thoughtfully enough, comparing our great expenditure of energy with the small results attained, and wondering how we were ever to make our port at last.

The scene thus conjured up awoke its corresponding fancies.

"Have you never reflected," said I, "on the utter fallacy of that French proverb which affirms, 'Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte?' Unless indeed it refers to immorality, the downward career of which beats the rolling stone of Sisyphus in a canter. But on all other journeys through life, it seems to me that not only the first steps, but the first leagues, are intensely laborious and unsatisfactory. Disappointment lies in wait at every milestone, and the traveller feels tired already ere he has reached the crest of the first hill. All crowns, I grant you, like those of the Isthmian Games, are mere parsley at best; but in these days no competitor ever wins that worthless headdress till he is so bald that common decency demands a covering. Where are the heaven-born statesmen now, to rule the destinies

of continents at twenty-six? the generals and admirals, who became world-wide heroes within ten years of corporal punishment at school? the poets full-fledged in immortality before their whiskers were grown? Where, in short, will you point me out a single instance of any individual attaining fame until his zest for it has passed away—winning his pedestal till his poor legs are too tired to stand straight thereon—making his fortune till he is too old to enjoy it; or, indeed, getting anything he wants *when* he wants it? Lazarus has no dinner—Dives has no appetite—Struggler, who thinks he has both, is sure to be kept waiting that extra half-hour, which sickens him, and finds he can't eat his soup when it comes!

"What up-hill work it is, that beginning of the pilgrimage. And how confidently we start in the glorious ignorance of youth, heads erect, backs straightened, footsteps

springing like a deer, with an utter disregard of warning, a sovereign contempt for advice. Like myself, I doubt not you have scaled many a hill, even when you carried more flesh than you do now. Don't you remember, in the clear, pure mountain air, how near the top looked from the valley down below? Don't you remember how, about noonday, still full of strength and spirit, though having done a stalwart spell of work, you spied the ridge that you were convinced must be your goal, and strained on, panting, heated, labouring, yet exultant, because success was so nearly within your grasp? A few more strides—hurrah! your chin is level with the ridge, and lo! there is another precisely similar to be surmounted at about the same angle and the same distance. Not yet discouraged, only a little startled and annoyed, till another and another have been gained, and so surprise

becomes disappointment, vexation, misgiving, discomfiture, and lastly, but to the strongest natures, despair! Even with these, when the real summit has been at length attained, all their long-looked-for enjoyment resolves itself into the negative satisfaction of rest; and for one who thus arrives exhausted at his destination, think how many a footsore, quivering, way-wearied wanderer must lie out all night shelterless, on the barren, wind-swept hill.

"It seems that the process, termed at Newmarket, 'putting a race-horse through the mill,' is practised with the human subject till he has learned the disheartening lesson that labour pushed to exhaustion borders on pain—that heartbreaking efforts, while they lower the tone of our whole system, are apt to destroy the very efficiency they are intended to enhance. I have heard good judges affirm that even at Newmarket

they are apt to over-train their horses. Do you not think that we, too, should run the race of life on better terms were we not put so pitilessly 'through the mill?'"

Here my companion allowed himself a mild gesture of dissent, clasping his bony fingers over his knotted knees, as if prepared to go into the subject at length. "You are one of those people," said he, "who seem to think the world is intended for a place of uninterrupted rest and enjoyment—a sort of 'Fiddler's Green,' as sailors term their paradise, where it is to be 'beer and skittles' every day and all day long. You would have no 'small end to the horn,' as my friends over the water say; and what sort of music do you think you could blow out of it? You would have food without hunger, rest without labour, energy without effort. You would be always going downhill, instead of up. And think where your

journey would end at last! You object to the mill, you say, and yet it is that same process of grinding which converts the grain into flour fit for bread. Look at the untried man, the youth embarking on his career, vain, ignorant, sanguine, over-confident, prejudiced. How is he to learn his own powers, his capabilities of endurance, his energy under difficulties, above all, his readiness of resource, save by repeated disappointment and reverse? You have alluded to statesmen, commanders, and poets, who, in seven-leagued boots as it were, reached the top of the hill at one stride. But Pitt's was an abnormal temperament—a grey head upon green shoulders—an old man's heart beating its regular pulsations within the slender compass of a young man's waistcoat. Nelson's chivalrous and romantic disposition preserved him from the overweening vanity and self-esteem that

might have been looked for as the result of such brilliant achievements at so early an age. His mad, absorbing passion, too, may have scored many a furrow in the hero's heart, while his young brow remained smooth and fair as marble. 'On vieillit bientôt sur le champ de bataille!' and the first Napoleon's aphorism holds good no surer on the field of honour than in the lists of love. Shelley's fate was scarcely an enviable one; and did you like Byron any better after you had read his letters and learned the demoralizing effects, even on such genius as his, of temples crowned by an immortal Fame, ere yet the beard had sprouted on his chin?

"Alexander of Macedon, indeed, conquered the world before he was thirty, and—drank himself to death ere he had reached his prime!

"The fact that he does not care one straw

about it, is the very antidote to preserve a man from the subtle poison of success. He who has been long climbing the ladder finds that when he looks over the parapet all sense of elevation and consequent giddiness is gone. Whatever others may think, to his own perceptions he is on a level with the rest of his kind — can judge of them, and for them, from the same point of view; and, more important still, experiences no misgivings that he may topple down and break his neck. Ambition is a glorious lure, no doubt, tempting the climber to noble efforts, skilful, vigorous, and well-sustained. But when he has reached the fancied resting-place so ardently desired, what does he find? A keener air, a scantier foothold, a sentry-box instead of a feather-bed, a stern necessity for further exertion, where he expected indulgence and enjoyment and repose.

"Duty is a cold-eyed monitress, reserved, inflexible, severe; Ambition, a high-born lady, haughty, capricious, unfeeling, like those dainty dames of old patrician Rome,

'Who in Corinthian mirrors their own proud smiles behold;
Who breathe of Capuan odours, and shine in Spanish gold;'

Pleasure, a laughing, lavish courtezan, gay, gaudy, thoughtless, slave to the impression of the hour. This last you may buy at your will for a handful of silver, or, at most, a talent of gold; and there are few, alas! who have not learned how soon her false smile palls upon the fancy, her painted cheek grows irksome to the eye. The second you must woo, with many a stealthy footstep, many a cringing bow, offering at her shrine truth, honour, self-respect, to find, if you are so fortunate as not to be discarded like a pair of worn-out gloves, that you have only gathered a nut without a kernel, after all. For the first, you must

serve as Jacob served, through long years of labour, patience, and self-denial; but when you have won your Rachel at last, she discloses for you all her glorious, unfading beauty, cleaving to you, true and constant through good and evil, the warmth and comfort of your hearth, the light of your happy home.

"When the courtezan has been paid off and dismissed in early youth, the haughty lady wooed through long years of manhood, and won, to be despised, in middle life, this is the goddess you claim to be your bride, and once wedded, you will never leave her till you die.

"The Isthmian crown was indeed woven from humble parsley, but do you think it could have borne a higher value had every leaf consisted of beaten gold? Which would you rather wear, the bronze Victoria Cross, or the Star and Ribbon of the Garter?

Depend upon it, that to the young champion of the games, flushed, exulting, treading upon air, that vegetable coronal represented everything most desirable and precious in earth or heaven. No; it is the old experienced athlete, the winner of a thousand prizes, who has learned the intrinsic value of the article, and who knows that its worth consists not in itself, nor even in the victory it represents, but in the strength of frame, the speed of foot attained by training for its pursuit. From many a long summer's day of toil and abstinence, from panting lungs and aching muscles, from brows covered with sweat, and feet with dust, he has wrested the endurance of the camel, the strength of the ox, and the footfall of the deer. Does he grudge his past labour? Not he, thankful that he has been 'through the mill.'

"I grant you the process is not entirely

pleasant; I grant you that effort is with many men a sensation of discomfort almost amounting to pain; that self-denial is very difficult to most, disappointment simply disgusting to all. When the body feels weary, the brain overtasked, we are apt to think the meal is being bolted too fine, the grinding becoming unnecessarily severe; above all, when that pitiless millstone comes crushing down upon the heart, and pounds it to powder, we cry aloud in our agony, and protest that no sorrow was ever so unbearable as ours. What mole working underground is so blind as humanity to its own good? Why, that same grinding to powder is the only means by which the daintiest flour can be obtained. The finest nature, like the truest steel, must be tempered in the hottest furnace; so much caloric would be thrown away on an inferior metal. Capacity for suffering infers also capacity for achieve-

ment; and who would grudge the pain about his brows, when it reminded him he was wearing an imperial crown?

"Sooner or later the process must be undergone by all. With some it goes on through a lifetime; others get the worst of it over in a few years. One man may have done with it altogether before his strength of mind or body has failed with declining age—

'Dum nova canities—dum prima et recta senectus.'

"His neighbour may have one foot in the grave before the grain has been thoroughly purged and sifted, and refined to its purest quality, but through the mill he must pass. It is just as much a necessity of humanity as hunger or thirst, or sorrow or decay. There is no escape. However long protracted, it is inexorable, unavoidable, and effectual, for

'Though the mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small.'"

CHAPTER III.

GOURDS.

SO Jonah was exceeding glad of the Gourd. I can understand his feelings perfectly. Does it not happen to most of us, at least once in a lifetime, thus to be "exceeding glad of the Gourd," and in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred with the same result? "*Nil violentum est perpetuum.*" So surely as it comes up in a night, so surely must it wither in a day. You have been in a hot climate? I don't intend any disagreeable allusion, I mean the tropics, I give you my honour! Do you not remem-

ber the delight of getting out of your tent, or "booth" as we still call them at our village merry-makings, to sit under anything like a tree or shrub, where, shaded from the sun, you could catch the welcome breath of every breeze that blew? The French officers in the Crimea used to build for themselves trellised out-houses of branches interlaced, swearing volubly the while, and appearing to derive from these bowers no small comfort and refreshment. I can imagine the astonishment of "*mon lieutenant*" when, on waking in his tent, he should have discovered, like "Jack and the Bean-stalk," that one of these had sprung up for him, unsolicited, in a night. How he would have stared, and shrugged, and gesticulated, and cursed his star with less asperity, and been "exceeding glad of the Gourd!"

They are of many kinds, these excrescences that grow up with such marvellous

celerity to afford us an intense and illusive delight; but they all resemble their prototype at Nineveh, in so far that, ere the seed has yet germinated, the worm is already prepared which shall smite the gourd, and cause it to wither away There were hundreds of them shot to gigantic dimensions and exploded with the South Sea bubble of the last century. Thousands owed their birth and disappearance to the railway fever of five-and-twenty years ago. Not a few were called into existence by a blockade of the Southern ports, during the late war of opinion in the United States, and destroyed by its suspension at the peace. It seems to be a law in the moral as in the physical world that the endurance of things must be in proportion to the length of time required to bring them to maturity. The oak is said to be three hundred years in arriving at its prime, and that its vigour is still

unimpaired after a thousand changes of foliage we have ocular demonstration in many parts of England; while the mustard-and-cress, which can be raised in twenty minutes on a square of flannel dipped in hot water, wastes and withers away in an hour.

The same in the animal creation. Like Minerva from the brain of Jove, the butterfly springs into its sunny existence, winged, armed, and clothed in gorgeous apparel, all at once; but when the night-breeze shakes the perfume from your garden-flowers, and the evening-bank of clouds is coming up from the west, you look for that ephemeral masterpiece in vain. Now the elephant only attains his majority, so to speak, when between forty and fifty years of age; therefore he has hardly become an "old rogue" at two hundred, and the identical proboscis that saluted Clyde, or curled

round the crushed remains of Tippoo Sahib's victims is to-day lowered in honour of our own *jeunesse dorée*, with whom a run through British India is considered little more of an expedition than a jaunt into Welsh Wales.

Cornaro, if I remember right, fixes the normal duration of life, in the Mammalia, at a term of five times the number of years required to reach their prime. Thus a dog, he says, comes to maturity at two, and lives till ten; a horse at five, and lives till five-and-twenty; and arguing by analogy, a man, who only attains his full strength at twenty-three or four, should not, therefore, if he led a natural and rational life, succumb till he had arrived at a hundred and fifteen or twenty years.

Forbid it, Atropos! for their sakes as well as ours. Think of the old fogies, now sufficiently numerous, who would overflow

the clubs! Think, when it came to our own turn, of the numbers of Gourds we should have raised, outlived, buried, but, alas! not forgotten.

"A fine old man, sir!" said one of the best judges of human nature that ever fathered a proverb. "There's no such thing. If his head or his heart had been worth anything, they would have worn him out years ago!"

"You have got off the subject as usual," objected Bones, "and are trenching on a topic of which you are far less qualified to speak than myself. What do you know about the duration of life, the ceaseless wear-and-tear, the gradual decay, the last flickers of the candle, leaping up, time after time, with delusive strength, until it goes out once for all? You can tell where Noah was, but do you know where the candle went to when it left the great sea-captain

in the dark? Not you! Never mind, don't fret, you will find out some day sure enough, and be as wise as 'Tullus, Ancus, good Eneas,' and the rest of us! In the meantime stick to your text. The morbid spirit possesses you, and well I know it will only come out of the man with much talking. If it does you any good, never mind *me*—fire away! Tell us something more about the Gourd, and the worm that smote it. That is what you are driving at, I feel sure."

"'Morbid!'" I repeated, somewhat indignantly. "And why *morbid*, I should like to know? A man takes his stand, as you and I do, outside of, and apart from, the circling, shifting mass of his fellow-creatures, and makes his own observations, uninfluenced by their clamour, their customs, their ridiculous prejudices and opinions, confiding those observations unreservedly to one who should, *ex-officio* indeed, be

entirely free from the earthly trammels that cumber liberal discussion in general society, and he is to be called *morbid*, forsooth! It was only one of your ghastly jests, was it? Enough! I am satisfied. There can be no bone of contention—I mean no subject of dispute—between you and me—we have not the ghost of a reason—I mean the shadow of a cause—for disagreement. I confess my weakness: I own to a fatal tendency to digression. One thought leads to another, and they follow in a string, like wild geese, or heirs of entail, '*velut unda supervenit undam.*' By the way, this very subject, the association of ideas, opens up a boundless field for speculation. But I refrain—I return to my Gourd—I am back in Nineveh with the prophet once more. Nineveh, in its imperial splendour, gorgeous in Eastern colouring, sublime with Eastern magnificence, glittering with Eastern deco-

rations—solemn, gloomy, and gigantic; grand in the massive dignity of size, winged bulls hewn from the solid rock guard the long perspective of a thousand avenues, leading to palaces that rise, tier upon tier, into the glowing sky Lavish profusion—marble, and bronze, and gold—gleams and dazzles and flashes in the streets. The palm-tree bends her graceful head earthward; the aloe aims her angry spikes at heaven; the camel, with meek appealing eyes, seems to protest against the bales of costly merchandize with which its back is piled; the white elephant in scarlet trappings, stolid and sagacious, stands patient, waiting for its lord; throngs of dusky, half-naked Asiatics pass to and fro along the baking causeways; loud bleatings of sheep, lowings of oxen, cries of parched, thirsty animals resound in the suburbs; while over all a Southern sun blazes down

with scorching fury, and an east wind off the Desert comes blustering in, hot and stifling, like a blast from hell.

"So the prophet is 'exceeding glad of his Gourd.' He will rest in its shade; he will look pitifully on the broiling passers-by; he will hug himself in that sense of comfort which human nature, alas! is too apt to experience from the very fact that others are in a worse condition than its own; but even while he thus rejoices, the worm has done its work—the Gourd is withered up, the sirocco suffocates his lungs, the sun beats on his head, and, like the rest of us when we lose that which we choose to consider the one thing essential to our happiness, he shows the white feather on the spot, and says, 'It is better for me to die than to live.'

"Death never seems to come for those who wish it—though perhaps if the Great

Liberator felt bound to appear every time he was invoked, the cry might not be raised quite so often. Who is there that has not bowed his head in misery, and wondered whether he could be so wretched anywhere else as here, in the mocking sunlight, with his Gourd withered before his face? It is gone—gone. See! There is the very spot on which it stood but yesterday, so green, so fresh, so full of life, so rich in promise! And to-day—a blank! It seems impossible! Ay, that is perhaps the worst of the suffering—that numbed, stupefied state, which refuses for a time to grasp the extent of its affliction—that perverse and cowardly instinct which clings to a thread that it yet knows is wholly severed—which turns even Hope to a curse, because it makes her a bar to resignation. Few of us can boast more courage than Jonah when the Gourd is fairly withered away.

"For one it has been riches, perhaps, comprising luxury, position, variety—all the advantages that spring from an abundance of worldly goods. Some fine morning, Fortune, '*ludem insolentem ludere pertinax*,' gives her wings a shake, spreads them, and flits away; leaving in her place haggard Want, gaunt Ruin, bailiffs in the drawing-room, furniture ticketed for sale up-stairs. The children's rocking-horse, the wife's pianoforte, all the well-known trflies of daily use and ornament, must be cast into the chasm, as the Romans threw their effects into that awkward rent in the Forum. And the master of the household is fortunate if he be not compelled, like Curtius, to leap in after his goods. His friends are astonished, and bless themselves. His relations had predicted the catastrophe long ago. These, of course, turn their backs on him, incontinently, from motives of self-respect, no

doubt, but a few of the former, such as had professed to love him least, lend a helping hand. Nevertheless, the Gourd is withered, and the man, faint and sick unto death, only wishes his hour was come and he might lie down to be at rest.

"Or it has been a child—God forbid it should have been an only one! Some golden-headed darling that used to patter downstairs with you every morning to breakfast, and stand at your elbow every night after dinner. Whose dancing eyes never met your own but with the merry, saucy, confiding glances that seldom outlast a fifth birthday, and to whom you could no more have said an unkind word than you could cut off your right hand. Yesterday it was chasing butterflies across the lawn, and you carried it yourself with laughing triumph, rosy, happy, and hungry, in to tea. But the worm had begun its work, even then. This morning you

missed the glad little voice at breakfast, and looking at the jam on the table a sad misgiving, stifled as soon as born, shot through you like a knife. It was pitiful to watch all day, in the nursery, by the little bed,—to see the golden head lying so listless, the chubby hands so waxen and still, the heavy lids drooping so wearily over the blue eyes that yet shone with a light you never saw in them before. There rose a mist to dim your own when the patient little voice asked, gently, 'Is that papa?'—and noticing two or three neglected playthings on the counterpane, you walked to the window and wept.

"So the afternoon wore on, and the doctor came, and there was cruel hope and torturing suspense, and a wrench that so stupefied you, it is difficult to remember anything clearly afterwards, though you have a dim perception of a pair of scissors severing some golden

curls, while nurse went down on her knees to pray.

"And at sundown you walk out into your garden along the very path that brought you both home yesterday, but you walk like a man in a dream, for ringing in your ears is the wail that was heard of old in Ramah, and you know your darling is with the angels, wondering feebly why that knowledge cannot console you more.

"Or perhaps your Gourd was 'only a woman's love!'—not a growth, certainly, however exuberant, on which a wise man should place so much dependence as on lignum vitæ, for instance, or heart-of-oak. But, so far as I can see, either wise men do not fall in love, or they allow wisdom to slip out of their grasp in the very act of making that fatal stumble. So, in defiance of all theory, warning, and practical experience, you may have congratulated yourself with

insane vehemence on the upspringing of this delicate exotic, and looked forward to the passing of many happy hours under its shade. You shut your eyes wilfully, of course, to the obvious fact that you never *are* happy, even when in full accomplishment of your wishes you stretch your lazy length at the feet of your Gourd. There is sure to be an insect that stings, or a sunbeam that dazzles, or a cold wind in the nape of your neck. Nevertheless, the vegetable, so long as it exists, is not only the delight of your heart, but the very sustenance of your brain. That is the fatal part of the disease. Your Gourd connects itself with everything you think, or do, or say, spreading her roots, as it were, over every foot of land you possess, shutting out earth's horizon with her slender stem, and, worse than all, poking her dainty head between you and heaven.

"Then, when she withers up—a disap-

pointment which, to do her justice, she is capable of inflicting in the loveliest weather and at the shortest notice—you find to your dismay that, with her, all the fair side of creation has withered too. There is no more freshness in the meadows, no more promise in the smile of spring. The scent is gone from the garden-flowers, the music from the song of birds. Summer's vivid glow has faded, and the russet of autumn is no longer edged with gold. Hope's rosy hues have ceased to tinge the morning, and the glory has departed from noonday.

"Like Jonah, you 'do well to be angry!' and it is well for you if you can be very angry indeed. That stimulant will do more to heal your wound over than any other remedy I can think of, except the planting of a fresh seedling to await another failure; but God help you if yours is a nature less susceptible of wrath than of sorrow! If you

are brave, generous, forgiving, confiding, 'Je vous en fais mon compliment!' There is no more to be said. Where your Gourd grew, nothing green will ever spring up again! What say you, Bones? I think you and I are well out of the whole thing!"

He waved his fleshless hand gently with the gesture of one who puts from him some dim and distant recollection.

"There is a bitter flavour," said he, "about that remark which I should hardly have expected, and which is by no means to my taste. You and I can surely afford to look at these things from a comprehensive, philosophical, and indulgent point of view. No more Gourds are likely to grow for either of us; and although your style of figure is, perhaps, less entitled to defy the worm than mine, yet I think you have but little to fear from the kind which caused such an outbreak of temper in the disgusted prophet.

The whole story of the Gourd, I need not point out to you, is a lesson. It was intended as a lesson for Jonah, it is intended as a lesson for ourselves. Forgive me for observing that you seem to have entirely lost the point of it, and, as usual in our discussions, you have sacrificed argument to declamation. It is weak, of course, to be too much delighted with the Gourd, it is cowardly to be too much afraid of the worm, but——"

"There is one kind of worm I am horribly afraid of," I interrupted, for I admit I was a little nettled and out of temper.

"And that?" he asked, with the courtesy which distinguishes his manner under all circumstances.

"Is the borer-worm!" I replied, brutally enough; and I am afraid he was a little hurt, for he rose at once and went into his cupboard, while I walked off moodily to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

A VAMPIRE.

LEANING idly against the chimney-piece the other night, contemplating my companion in his usual attitude, my elbow happened to brush off the slab a Turkish coin of small value and utterly illegible inscription. How strangely things come back to one! I fancied myself once more on the yellow wave of the broad Danube; once more threading those interminable green hills that fringe its banks; once more wondering whether the forest of Belgrade had been vouchsafed to Eastern Europe as a type of

Infinity, while its massive fortress, with frowning rampart and lethargic Turkish sentries, was intended to represent the combination of courage and sloth, of recklessness and imperturbability, of apparent strength and real inefficiency, which distinguishes most arrangements of the Ottoman Empire.

"Bakaloum" and "Bismillah!" "Take your chance!" and "Don't care a d—n," seem to be the watchwords of this improvident Government. It lets the ship steer herself; and she makes, I believe, as bad weather of it as might be expected under such seamanship.

Engrossed far less, I admit, with political considerations than with the picturesque appearance of a Servian population attending their market, I rather startled my friend with the abruptness of the following question:

"Do you believe there is such a thing as a Vampire?"

He rattled a little and almost rose to his feet, but re-seating himself, only rejoined,

"Why do you ask?"

"I was thinking," I replied, "of that romantic-looking peasantry I used to see thronging the market-place of Belgrade. Of those tall, handsome men, with the scowl never off their brows, their hands never straying far from the bellyful of weapons they carried in their shawls. Of those swarthy wild-eyed women, with their shrill, rapid voices, their graceful, impatient gestures, carrying each of them the available capital of herself and family strung in coins about her raven hair, while on every tenth face at least, of both sexes, could not fail to be observed the wan traces of that wasting disease which seems to sap strength and vitality, gradually, and almost surely, as consumption itself. Yes, I think for every score of peasants I could have counted two

of these 'fever-faces,' as the people themselves call their ague-ridden companions, though I ascertained after a while, when I came to know them better, that they attributed this decimation of their numbers, and faded appearance of the victims, rather to supernatural visitation than epidemic disease. They believe that in certain cases, where life has been unusually irregular, or the rites of religion reprehensibly neglected, the soul returns after death to its original tenement, and the corpse becomes revivified under certain ghastly conditions of a periodical return to the tomb and a continual warfare against its kind. An intermittent existence is only to be preserved at the expense of others, for the compact, while it permits reanimation, withholds the blood, 'which is the life thereof.' The stream must therefore be drained from friends, neighbours, early companions, nay, is most

nourishing and efficacious when abstracted from the veins of those heretofore best beloved. So the Vampire, as this weird being is called, must steal from its grave in the dead of night, to sit by some familiar bedside till the sleeper shall be steeped in the unconsciousness of complete repose, and then puncturing a minute orifice in the throat, will suck its fill till driven back to its resting-place by the crimson streaks of day. Night after night the visits must be repeated; and so, week by week, the victim pines and droops and withers gradually away. There is no apparent illness, no ostensible injury, but the frame dwindles, the muscles fall, the limbs fail, the cheek fades, and the death-look, never to be mistaken, comes into the great haggard, hollow, wistful eyes. I have repeatedly asked the peasants whether they had ever met any of these supernatural visitants, for they spoke

of them so confidently, one might have supposed the famished ghouls were flitting about the villages nightly; but though presumptive evidence was forthcoming in volumes, I was never fortunate enough to find an actual eye-witness. The sister of one had been frightened by them repeatedly; the cousin of another he had himself carried to her tomb, drained of her last life-drops by a relative buried some weeks before; and the grandmother of a third had not only met and talked with this inconvenient connexion, expostulating with it on its depraved appetites, and generally arguing the point on moral as well as sanitary grounds, but had induced it by her persuasions, and the power of a certain amulet she wore, to abstain from persecuting a damsel in the neighbouring village for the same ghastly purpose, or, at least, to put off its visits till the horrid craving should be no longer endurable. Still

I could meet nobody who had actually seen one in person; and that is why I asked you just now if you believed there was such a thing as a Vampire?"

He nodded gravely. "They are rare," said he; "but I believe in such beings, because I have not only seen one, but had the advantage of its personal notice, and a very pretty, pleasing acquaintance it was! You would like to know something more? Well, it compromises nobody. You will not quote me, of course. Indeed I don't see how you can, for I still mention no real names. I don't mind telling you the story of a life, such as I knew it; a life that by some fatality seemed to drag down every other that came within the sphere of its attractions to sorrow, humiliation, and disgrace. I have no brain to swim, no pulses to leap, no heart to ache left, and yet the memory stirs me painfully even now.

"In early manhood," he continued, bending down as though to scan his own fleshless proportions with an air of consciousness that was almost grotesque, "I paid as much heed to my personal appearance, and flourished it about in public places as persistently as others of like age and pursuits. Whether I should do so if I had my time to come again, is a different question, but we will let that pass. Being then young, tolerably good-looking, sufficiently conceited, and exceedingly well-dressed, I had betaken myself one evening to your Italian Opera, the best, and I may add the dearest, in Europe. I vas fond of music and knew something about it, but I was fonder still of pretty women, though concerning these I enjoyed my full share of that ignorance which causes men so to exaggerate their qualities both good and bad; an ignorance it is worth while to preserve with as much

care as in other matters we take to acquire knowledge, for there is no denying, alas! that those who know them best always seem to respect them least.

"I rose, therefore, from my stall at the first opportunity and turned round to survey the house. Ere I had inspected a quarter of it, my glasses were up, and I will tell you what they showed me—the most perfect face I ever saw. Straight nose, thin and delicately cut, large black eyes, regular eyebrows, faultless chin, terminating a complete oval, the whole set in a frame of jet-black hair. Even my next neighbour, who, from an observation he let fall to a friend, belonged apparently to the Household Troops, could not refrain from ejaculating 'By Jove, she's a ripper!' the moment he caught sight of the object on which my gaze was fixed.

"I saw something else too. I saw that

the lady by her side was a foreigner with whom I had long been acquainted; so edging my way into the passages, in two minutes I was tapping at their box-door like a man who felt pretty sure of being let in.

"The foreigner introduced me to her friend, and as the second act of the opera was already in progress, told me to sit down and hold my tongue. We were four in the box. Another gentleman was placed close behind the lady who first attracted my attention. I had only eyes just then, however, for the wild, unearthly beauty of my new acquaintance.

"I have seen hundreds of pretty women, and even in youth my heart, from temperament, perhaps, rather than reflection, was as hard as my ribs; but this face fascinated me—I can use no other word. My sensations were so strangely compounded of ad-

miration, horror, interest, curiosity, attraction, and dislike. The eyes were deep and dark, yet with the glitter in them of a hawk's, the cheek deadly pale, the lips bright red. She was different from anything I had ever seen, and yet so wonderfully beautiful! I longed to hear her speak. Presently she whispered a few words to the man behind her, and I felt my flesh creep. Low as they were modulated, there was in every syllable a tone of such utter hopelessness, such abiding sorrow, regret, even remorse, always present, always kept down, that I could have imagined her one of those lost spirits for whom is fixed the punishment of all most cruel, most intolerable, that they can never forget they are formed for better things. Her gestures, too, were in accordance with the sad, suggestive music of her voice—quiet, graceful, and somewhat listless in the repose, as it

seemed, rather of unhappiness than of indolence. I tell you I was not susceptible; I don't think boys generally are. In love, more than in any other extravagance, 'there is no fool like an old one.'

"I was as little given to romance as a ladies' doctor; and yet, sitting in that box watching the turn of her beautiful head as she looked towards the stage, I said to myself, 'I'll take good care she never gets the upper hand of *me*. If a man once allowed himself to like her at all, she is just the sort of woman who would blight his whole life for him, and hunt the poor devil down to his grave!' Somebody else seemed to have no such misgivings, or to have arrived at a stage of infatuation when all personal considerations had gone by the board. If ever I saw a calf led to the slaughter it was Count V——, a calf, too, whose throat few women could have cut without compunc-

tion. Handsome, manly, rich, affectionate, and sincere, worshipping his deity with all the reckless devotion, all the unscrupulous generosity of his brave Hungarian heart, I saw his very lip quiver under its heavy moustache when she turned her glittering eyes on him with some allusion called up by the business of the stage, and the proud, manly face that had never quailed before an enemy grew white in the intensity of its emotion. What made me think of a stag I once found lying dead in a Styrian pass, and a golden eagle feasting on him with her talons buried in his heart?

"The Gräfinn, to whom the box belonged, noticed my abstraction. 'Don't fall in love with her,' she whispered; 'I can't spare you just yet. Isn't she beautiful?'

"'You introduced me,' was my answer, 'but you never told me her name.'"

"'How stupid!' said the Gräfinn. 'At

present she is a Madame *de* St. Croix, an Englishwoman nevertheless, and a widow, but not likely to remain so long.' And with a mischievous laugh she gave me her hand as I left the box, bowing to Madame de St. Croix and also to the Hungarian, who in his happy preoccupation was perfectly unconscious of my politeness.

"I saw them again in the crush-room. The Gräfinn had picked up an *attaché* to some legation, who put her dutifully into her carriage. The Hungarian was still completely engrossed with Madame *de* St. Croix. I have not yet forgotten the look on his handsome face when she drove off with her friend. 'He's a fool,' I said to myself; 'and yet a woman might well be proud to make a fool of such a man as that.'

"I left London in the middle of the season, and thought no more of Madame *de*

St. Croix. I had seen a pretty picture, I had heard a strain of sweet music, I had turned over the page of an amusing romance—there was an end of it.

"The following winter I happened to spend in Vienna. Of course I went to one of the masked balls of *The Redouten-Saal.* I had not been ten minutes in the room when my ears thrilled to the low, seductive accents of that well-remembered voice. There she was again, masked of course, but it was impossible to mistake the slim, pliant figure, the graceful gestures, the turn of the beautiful head, and the quiet energy that betrayed itself, even in the small, gloved hand. She was talking to a well-known Russian magnate less remarkable for purity of morals than diplomatic celebrity, boundless extravagance, and devotion to the other sex. To be on terms of common friendship with such a man was at least

compromising to any lady under sixty years of age; and it is needless to say that his society was courted and appreciated accordingly.

"Madame *de* St. Croix seemed well satisfied with her neighbour; and though in her outward manner the least demonstrative of women, I could detect through her mask the same cruel glitter in her dark eyes that had so fascinated me, six months before, in the Gräfinn's opera-box. The Russian talked volubly, and she leaned towards him, as those do who are willing to hear more. *Château qui parle* furls its banner, *femme qui écoute* droops her head. Directly opposite, looking very tall and fierce as he reared himself against the doorway, stood Count V——. The Hungarian was pale as death. On his face, so worn and haggard, so cruelly altered since I saw it last, was set the stamp of physical pain,

and he gnawed the corner of his brown moustache with that tension of the muscles about the mouth which denotes a paroxysm bravely kept down. As friends accosted him in passing, he bowed his head kindly and courteously while his whole face softened, but it was sad to see how soon the gleam passed away and the cloud came back, darker and heavier than before. The man's heart, you see, was generous, kindly, and full of trust—such a heart as women like Madame *de* St. Croix find it an interesting amusement to break.

"I think he must have made her some kind of appeal; for later in the evening I observed them together, and he was talking earnestly in German, with a low pleading murmur, to which I thought few women could have listened unmoved. She answered in French; and I was sorry for him when she broke up the colloquy with a little scornful shrug of her shoulders, observing in a hard,

unfeeling tone not like her usual voice, 'Que voulez-vous? Enfin, c'est plus fort que moi!'

"The Russian put her into her sledge, for there was a foot of snow in the streets, and Count V—— walked home through it, with a smile on his face and his head up, looking strangely elated, I thought, for a man, the last strand of whose moorings had lately parted and left him adrift.

"I had not then learned there is no temporary stimulant so powerful as despair, no tonic so reviving as a *parti pris*.

"Next day, lounging into the *Chancellerie* of the Embassy for my usual gossip, I found little Hughes, an unpaid *attaché* (who earned, indeed, just as much as he received), holding forth with considerable spirit and energy.

"'Curse him!' said this indomitable young Briton. 'If it had been swords, I should like to have fought him myself. I

hate him! I tell you. Everybody hates him. And V—— was the best chap between here and Orsova. He was almost like an Englishman. Wouldn't he just have polished him off if they'd had swords. That old muff, Bergheimer of the Cuirassiers, ought to be hanged. Do you think, if *I'd* been his second, I'd have put him up with pistols against the best shot in Europe?—and at the barrier too! It's not like at home, you know. I never knew such a mull as they made of it amongst them. This cursed Calmuck gets the pull all through, and poor V——, who had lost his fortune already, loses his lady-love and his life. What a rum world it is!'

"Here the orator rolled and lit a cigarette, thus affording me a moment to inquire into the cause of his indignation. I then learned that, in consequence of a trifling dispute after last night's ball, a duel had been fought

at daybreak, in the snow, between Count V—— and a Russian nobleman, in which the former was shot through the heart.

"'Never got *one* in at all!' said Hughes, again waxing eloquent on his friend's wrongs. 'I've seen both the seconds since. They were to walk up to a handkerchief, and the Russian potted him at forty yards the first step he made. They may say what they like about the row originating in politics—I know better. They quarrelled because Madame *de* St. Croix had left V—— and taken up with this snub-nosed Tartar. First, she ruined my poor friend. I know all about it. He hadn't a rap left; for if she'd asked him for the shirt off his back, he'd have stripped like beans! Then she broke his heart—the cheeriest, jolliest, kindest fellow in Europe—to finish up by leaving him for another man, who kills him before breakfast without a scruple; and if

the devil don't get hold of *her* some fine day, why he's a disgrace to his appointment, that's all! and they ought to make him Secretary of Legation here, or pension him off somewhere and put him out of the way! Have another cigarette!'

"Ten years afterwards I was sitting in the gardens of the Tuileries, one fine morning towards the middle of May, wondering, as English people always do wonder, on a variety of subjects—why the cigars were so bad in Paris, and the air so exhilarating—why the tender green leaves quivering over those deep alleys should have a sunshine of their own besides that which they reflected from above—why the *bonnes* and nursery-maids wore clean caps every day—why the railings always looked as if they had been re-gilt the same morning, and why the sentry at the gate should think it part of his duty to leer at every woman who passed, like a satyr?

"Indeed I believe I was almost asleep, when I started in my chair, and rubbed my eyes to make sure it was not a dream. There, within ten paces of me, sat Madame *de* St. Croix, if I was still to call her so, apparently not an hour older than the first time we met. The face was even paler, the lips redder, the cruel eyes deeper and darker, but in that flickering light the woman looked more beautiful than ever. She was listening quietly and indolently, as of old, to a gentleman who sat with his back to me, telling his own story, whatever it might be, in a low, earnest, impressive voice. I raised my hat when I caught her eye, and she bowed in return politely enough, but obviously without recognition. The movement caused her companion to turn round, and in two strides he was by my chair, grasping me cordially by the hand. He was an old and intimate friend, a colonel in the French army, by

whose side I had experienced more than one strange adventure, both in Eastern Europe and Asia-Minor—a man who had served with distinction, of middle-age, a widower, fond of society, field-sports, speculation, and travelling; essentially *bon camarade*, but thoroughly French in his reflections and opinions. The last man in the world, I should have thought, to be made a fool of by a woman. Well, there he was, her bounden slave! Absurdly happy if she smiled, miserable when she frowned, ready to fetch and carry like a poodle, perfectly childish about her, and utterly contemptible. If she had really cared for him, the temptation must have been irresistible, and she would have bullied him frightfully. But no, there was always the same repose of manner, the same careless kindness, the same melancholy, the same consciousness of an unquestionable superiority. One of his reasons, he soon con-

fided to me, for being so fond of her was, that they never had an angry word! For a week or two I saw a good deal of them. Paris was already empty, and we did our plays, our Opéra Comique, and our little dinners pleasantly enough She was always the same, and I found myself, day by day, becoming more conscious of that nameless charm about her, which I should despair of being able to describe. Yet as often as I met the glance of those deep, dark, unearthly eyes, a shudder crept over me, such as chills you when you come face to face with a ghost in your dreams. The colonel, I have said, was devoted to her. He was rarely absent from her side, but if by chance alone with me, would talk of her by the hour.

"He had found, he declared, fortunately before he was too old to appreciate it, the one inestimable treasure the earth contained. He had cherished his fancies, committed his

follies, of course, *tout comme un autre*, but he had never experienced anything like this. It was his haven, his anchorage, his resting-place, and he might glide down into old age, and on to death, perfectly happy, because confident, that with *her* heart and *her* force of character, she would never change. He could not be jealous of her. Oh no! She was so frank, so confiding, so sincere. She, too, *passé par là*, had told him so; unlike other women, had confessed to him not only her last, but her many former attachments. He knew all about poor V——, who was shot in a duel, and the Russian general, banished to Siberia. How fortunate she had broken with him before his disgrace, because, in the loyalty of her nature, she would surely have followed him into exile, although she never cared for him in her heart, never! No, nor for any of the others; never had been fairly touched till now. Him, the

colonel, she really *did* love. He had proved his devotion so thoroughly (I found out afterwards, though not from him, that my friend had been fool enough to sacrifice both fortune and profession for her sake), he was so reliable, she said, so kind, and so *good*. In short, he was perfectly happy, and could see no cloud in his horizon, look which way he would.

"When I left Paris they accompanied me to the railway station; and the last I saw of them was their two heads very close over a railway guide, projecting a trip into a lonely part of Switzerland, where they would have no society but their own.

"Six months afterwards 'Galignani' informed me that my friend the colonel had been reinstated in the French army and appointed to a regiment of Chasseurs d'Afrique then serving in Algeria, where, before the Tuileries Gardens were again green, I

learned from the same source he had already solved the great problem in an affair of outposts with the Khabyles. Long years elapsed, and there were streaks of grey in my hair and whiskers ere I saw Madame *de* St. Croix again. I had heard of her, indeed, at intervals both in London and Paris. I am bound to say her name was always coupled with those who were distinguished by birth, talent, or success. She was very choice, I believe, in the selection of her victims, despising equally an easy conquest and one of which the ravages could be readily repaired. The women hated her, the men said she was charming. For my part I kept out of her way: we were destined to meet nevertheless. I had embarked in a Peninsular and Oriental steamer at Marseilles very much indisposed, and retiring at once to my berth never quitted it till we were entering the Straits of Buoni-faccio. Here I came on

deck, weak, exhausted, but convalescent, drinking in the sunshine and the scenery with that thirst for the beautiful which becomes so fierce after the confinement of recent illness. I literally revelled in the Mediterranean air, and basked in the warmth of those bright colours so peculiar to the shores of that summer-sea. I was approaching middle age; I had ventured body and mind freely enough in the great conflict; and yet, I thank heaven, had hitherto been spared the crushing sorrow that makes a mockery of the noblest and purest enjoyments of earth, causing a man to turn from all that is fairest in sight and sense and sound with the sickness of a dead hope curdling at his heart. But then I had kept clear of Madame *de* St. Croix.

"When my eyes were at last sated with the gaudy hues of the coast and the golden glitter of the water, I was a little surprised

to see that lady sitting within three paces of me reading a yellow-bound French novel. Great heaven! what was the woman's secret? She looked younger than ever! Even in the searching glare of a southern noon not a line could be detected on the pure, pale forehead, not a crease about the large, wistful, glittering eyes. That she was gifted with perennial youth I could see for myself; that she was dangerous even to the peace of a grey-haired man, I might have found out to my cost had our voyage been retarded by contrary winds or any such unavoidable delay, for she was good enough to recognise me on this occasion, and to give me a large share of her conversation and companionship. Thus it was I learned to own the spell under which so many had succumbed, to appreciate its power, not to understand, far less describe, its nature. Fortunately for me, ere its work could be

completed, we arrived at Athens, and at Athens lay a trim, rakish-looking English yacht, with her ensign flying and her fore-topsail loosed, waiting only the steamer's arrival to spread her wings and bear off this seductive sorceress to some garden of paradise in the Egean Sea.

"The owner of the yacht I had often heard of. He was a man remarkable for his enterprise and unfailing success in commerce as for his liberality, and indeed extravagance, in expenditure. He chose to have houses, pictures, horses, plate, everything of the best, was justly popular in society, and enormously rich

"I never asked and never knew the port to which that yacht was bound. When we steamed out of the harbour she was already hull-down in the wake of a crimson sunset that seemed to stain the waters with a broad track of blood; but I saw her sold within eighteen months at Southampton, for her

late owner's name had appeared in the 'Gazette,' and the man himself, I was told, might be found, looking very old and care-worn, setting cabbages at Hanwell, watching eagerly for the arrival of a lady who never came.

"You may believe I thought more than once of the woman whose strange destiny it had been thus to enslave generation after generation of fools, and to love whom seemed as fatal as to be a priest of Aricia or a favourite of Catharine II. Nevertheless, while time wore on, I gradually ceased to think of her beauty, her heartlessness, her mysterious youth, or her magic influence over mankind. Presently, amongst a thousand engrossing occupations and interests, I forgot her as if she had never been.

"I have driven a good many vehicles in my time, drags, phaetons, dogcarts, down to a basket carriage drawn by a piebald pony

with a hog-mane. Nay, I once steered a Hansom cab up Bond Street in the early morning, freighted with more subalterns than I should like to specify of her Majesty's Household Troops, but I never thought I should come to a Bath chair!

"Nevertheless I found myself at last an inside passenger of one of these locomotive couches, enjoying the quiet and the air of the gardens at Hampton Court in complete and uninterrupted solitude. The man who dragged me to this pleasant spot having gone to 'get his dinner,' as he called it, and the nursery-maids, with their interesting charges, having retired from their morning, and not yet emerged for their afternoon, stroll, I lay back, and thought of so many things—of the strength and manhood that had departed from me for ever; of the strange, dull calm that comes on with the evening of life, and contents us so well we

would not have its morning back if we could; of the *gradual clairvoyance* that shows us everything in its true colours and at its real value; of the days, and months, and years so cruelly wasted, but that their pleasures, their excitements, their sins, their sorrows, and their sufferings, were indispensable for the great lesson which teaches us *to see*. Of these things I thought, and through them still, as at all times, moved the pale presence of an unforgotten face, passing like a spirit, dim and distant, yet dear as ever, across the gulf of years — a presence that, for good or evil, was to haunt me to the end.

"Something in the association of ideas reminded me of Madame *de* St. Croix, and I said to myself, 'At last age must have overtaken that marvellous beauty, and time brought the indomitable spirit to remorse, repentance, perhaps even amendment. What

can have made me think of her in a quiet, peaceful scene like this ?'

"Just then a lady and gentleman crossed the gravel walk in front of me, and took their places on a seat under an old tree not a dozen yards off. It was a lovely day in early autumn; the flowers were still a-blaze with the gaudiest of their summer beauty, the sky was all dappled grey and gold, earth had put on the richest dress she wears throughout the year; but here and there a leaf fell noiseless on the sward, as if to testify that she too must shed all her glories in due season, and yield, like other beauties, her unwilling tribute to decay.

"But there was nothing of autumn in the pair who now sat opposite my couch, chatting, laughing, flirting, apparently either ignoring or disregarding my proximity. The man was in all the bloom and beauty of youth; the woman, though looking a few

years older, did not yet seem to have attained her prime. I could scarcely believe my eyes! Yes, if ever I beheld Madame *de* St. Croix, there she sat with her fatal gaze turned on this infatuated boy, leading him gradually, steadily, surely, to the edge of that chasm, into which those who plunged came to the surface nevermore. It was the old story over again. How well I remembered, even after such an interval, the tender droop of the head, the veiling eyelashes, the glance so quickly averted, yet, like a snapshot, telling with such deadly effect; the mournful smile, the gentle whisper, the quiet confiding gesture of the slender hand, all the by-play of the most accomplished and most unscrupulous of actresses. There was no more chance of escape for her companion than for a fisherman of the North Sea, whose skiff has been sucked into the Maëlstrohm, with mast unshipped and oars adrift

half a mile astern. By sight, if not personally, I then knew most of the notabilities of the day. The boy, for such I might well call him in comparison with myself, seemed too good for his fate, and yet I saw well enough it was inevitable. He had already made himself a name as a poet of no mean pretensions, and held besides the character of a high-spirited, agreeable, and unaffected member of society Add to this, that he was manly, good-looking, and well-born; nothing more seemed wanting to render him a fit victim for the altar at which he was to be offered up. Like his predecessors, he was fascinated. The snake held him in her eye. The poor bird's wings were fluttering, its volition was gone, its doom sealed. Could nothing save it from the destroyer? I longed to have back, if only for a day, the powers which I had regretted so little half an hour ago. Weak,

helpless, weary, and worn-out, I yet determined to make an effort, and save him if I could.

"They rose to go, but found the gate locked through which they had intended to pass. She had a way of affecting a pretty wilfulness in trifles, and sent him to fetch the key. Prompt to obey her lightest wish, he bounded off in search of it, and following slowly, she passed within two paces of my chair, bending on its helpless invalid a look that seemed to express far less pity for his condition than a grudging envy of his lot. I stopped her with a gesture that in one more able-bodied would have been a bow, and, strange to say, she recognized me at once. There was not a moment to lose. I took courage from a certain wistful look that gave softness to her eyes, and I spoke out.

"'We shall never meet again,' I said;

'we have crossed each other's paths, at such long intervals, and on such strange occasions, but I know this is the last of them! Why time stands still for *you* is a secret I cannot fathom, but the end must come some day, put it off however long you will. Do you not think that when you become as I am, a weary mortal, stumbling with half-shut eyes on the edge of an open grave, it would be well to have one good deed on which you could look back, to have reprieved one out of the many victims on whom you have inflicted mortal punishment for the offence of loving you so much better than you deserve? Far as it stretches behind you, every footstep in your track is marked with sorrow—more than one with blood. Show mercy now, as you may have to ask it hereafter. Life is all before this one, and it seems cruel thus to blast the sapling from its very roots. He is hopeful,

trustful, and fresh-hearted—spare him and let him go.'

"She was fitting the glove on her faultless little hand. Her brow seemed so calm, so soft and pure, that for a moment I thought I had conquered, but looking up from her feminine employment, I recognized the hungry glitter in those dark, merciless eyes, and I knew there was no hope.

"'It is too late,' she answered, 'too late to persuade either him or me. It is no fault of mine. It is fate. For him—for the others—for all of us. Sometimes I wish it had not been so. Mine has been an unhappy life, and there seems to be no end, no resting-place. I can no more help myself than a drowning wretch, swept down by a torrent; but I am too proud to catch at the twigs and straws that would break off in my hand. I would change places with you willingly. Yes—you in that

Bath chair. I am so tired sometimes, and yet I dare not wish it was all over. Think of me as forbearingly as you can, for we shall not cross each other's path again.'

"'And this boy?' I asked, striving to detect something of compunction in the pitiless face that was yet so beautiful.

"'He must take his chance with the rest,' she said. 'Here he comes — good-bye.'

"They walked away arm-in-arm through the golden autumn weather, and a chill came into my very heart, for I knew what that chance was worth.

"A few months, and the snow lay six inches deep over the grave of him whose opening manhood had been so full of promise, so rich in all that makes youth brightest, life most worth having; while a woman in deep mourning was praying there, under the wintry sky; but this woman was his

mother, and her heart was broken for the love she bore her boy.

"His death had been very shocking, very sudden. People talked of a ruptured blood-vessel, a fall on his bed-room floor, a doctor not to be found when sent for; a series of fatalities that precluded the possibility of saving him; but those who pretended to know best affirmed that not all the doctors in Europe could have done any good, for when his servant went to call him in the morning he found his master lying stark and stiff, having been dead some hours. There was a pool of blood on his carpet; there were ashes of burnt letters in his fire-place; more, they whispered with meaning shrugs and solemn, awe-struck faces—

> 'There was that across his throat
> Which you had hardly cared to see.'

"You can understand now that I believe in Vampires."

"What became of her?" I asked, rather eagerly, for I was interested in this Madame *de* St. Croix. I like a woman who goes into extremes, either for good or evil. Great recklessness, equally with great sensibility, has its charm for such a temperament as mine. I can understand, though I cannot explain, the influence possessed by very wicked women who never scruple to risk their own happiness as readily as their neighbours'. I wanted to know something more about Madame *de* St. Croix, but he was not listening; he paid no attention to my question. In a tone of abstraction that denoted his thoughts were many miles away, he only murmured,

"Insatiate—impenetrable—pitiless. The others were bad enough in all conscience, but I think she might have spared the boy!"

CHAPTER V

GOLD FOR SILVER.

"The African Magician never minded all their scoffs and holloaings, or all they could say to him, but still cry'd *Who'll change old Lamps for new ones?* which he repeated so often about the Princess *Badroulbondour's* Palace, that that Princess, who was then in the Hall with the four-and-twenty Windows, hearing a Man cry something, and not being able to distinguish his Words, by reason of the holloaing of the Mob about him, sent one of her Women Slaves down to know what he cry'd.

"The Slave was not long before she return'd, and ran into the Hall, laughing so heartily, that the Princess could not forbear herself. 'Well, Gigler,' said the Princess, 'will you tell me what you laugh at?' 'Alas! Madam,' answered the Slave, laughing still, 'who can forbear laughing to see a Fool with a Basket on his Arm, full of fine new Lamps, ask to change them for old ones, which makes the Children and Mob make such a Noise about him?'"

WHAT a fool they thought him, and no wonder. Yet surely a magician need not come all the way from

Africa to teach the public this strange rate of exchange. In Europe, Asia, and America too, as far as it has yet been colonized, such one-sided bargains are made every day.

Old lamps for new, kicks for halfpence—"Heads I win, Tails you lose"—such are the laws of equity by which man deals with his neighbour; and so the contest goes on, if, indeed, as Juvenal says, that can be called a contest—

"Ubi tu pulsas, ego vapulo tantum."*

The slave of the princess with the long name had passed more of her life in the palace than the streets, or she would not have found the magician's cry so strange: would have felt uncomfortably conscious that the day might come when she, too, would

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* "If that's a fight indeed,
Where you strike hard, and I stand still and bleed."

barter new lamps for old, perhaps humbly on her knees, entreating permission to make the unequal exchange. In all the relations of life, but chiefly in those with which the affections are concerned, we constantly see gold for silver offered with both hands.

That "it is better to give than to receive' we have Scriptural warrant for asserting That—

> "Sure the pleasure is as great
> In being cheated as to cheat,'

we learn from Butler's quaint and philosophical couplets. I am not going to assert that the man who puts down sovereigns and takes up shillings has really the worst of it; I only maintain that the more freely he "parts" with the former, the more sparing will he find the latter doled out to him in return.

Perhaps the strongest case in point is that of parent and child.

In the animal world I know few arrangements of Nature more beautiful than the absolute devotion of maternity to its offspring, so long, though *only* so long, as its assistance is required. A bird feeding her young, a tigress licking her cubs, a mare wheeling round her foal — each of these affords an example of loving care and tenderness, essentially feminine in its utter forgetfulness of self. Each of these squanders such gold as it possesses, the treasure of its deep instinctive affection, on ingratitude and neglect. The nestlings gape with hungry little beaks, when they hear the flap of wings, not to greet the coming provider, but that they may eat and be filled. The cubs huddle themselves up to their mother's side, for warmth and comfort, not for her cruel beauty nor her fierce protecting love. The foal, when it gets on its long legs, will follow your horse or mine as readily as its dam.

They take all, to give back nothing in exchange. And no sooner can the bird use its wings, the beast its limbs, than it abandons at once and for ever the parent whose sustaining care is no longer necessary to its existence.

With the human race, although I am far from affirming that, even in this age of bronze, filial piety has fled with other virtues from the earth, something of the same unequal barter holds good in the relationship of parent and child. The former gives gold, the latter does not always return silver. Do not deceive yourself. You love your children more than your children love you. I can prove it in three words. They are dearer to you than your own parents. And this inequality of affection is but one more of the beautiful arrangements made by that Providence which bestows good so liberally in proportion to evil. Under the common

law of Nature, you are likely to die first, and the aggregate amount of suffering is, therefore, much less than it would be did the course of domestic affection flow the other way. So you toil, and slave, and scheme for the child's benefit, forgiving its errors, repairing its follies, re-establishing its fortunes, just as, long ago, you used to rebuild with loving patience those houses of cards the urchin blew down with such delight. But, as of all human affections, this, if not the strongest, is certainly the deepest and most abiding, so when wounded, does it inflict on our moral being the sharpest and most enduring pain. "Is there any cause in Nature that makes these hard hearts?' says poor King Lear, forced, against his own instincts, to acknowledge the venomed bite of that "serpent's tooth" with which elsewhere he compares a "thankless child." I have known men, and women, too, accept

with courage every sample of misfortune and disgrace—in the language of the prize-ring, "come up smiling" after every kind of knock-down blow—but I cannot remember an instance in which the ingratitude of children has not produced wrinkles and grey hairs, in the proportion of ten to one, for every other sorrow of any description whatever.

There is no prospect of alleviation to amuse his fancy—no leavening of pique to arouse his pride. Hurt to the death, the sufferer has scarce manhood enough left to conceal his wounds.

In that conflict between man and woman which is perpetually going on, and without which the world, if more comfortable, would undoubtedly be less populous, gold is invariably given for silver with a lavish extravagance, akin to the absurdity of the whole thing.

Why is love like the handle of a teapot? —Because it is all on one side. The game has yet to be invented in which both players can win; and perhaps were it not for the discomfort, anxiety, worry, sorrow, and suffering entailed by the unequal pastime, it would cease to be so popular. As it exists at present, there is nothing to complain of on the score of flagging interest. At first, indeed, before the cards are cut, the adversaries sit down calmly and pleasantly enough. An hour hangs heavy on their hands, and they think thus to drive it agreeably away —beginning simply for "distraction," as the French call it, though ending in the English acceptation of that uncomfortable word. Ere the first tricks are turned, however, the game grows exciting. "I propose." "How many?" "Hearts are trumps." "I mark the king." The stakes increase rapidly in value, and presently gold comes pouring

lavishly out of one player's pocket, against silver dribbling unwillingly from the other's. The winner, too, like all gamblers, seldom cares to keep the fruit of his good fortune, but loses it again at another table to some stronger adversary, who is beggared in turn elsewhere.

Yet still in all places, and under all circumstances, wherever this game is played there is the same inequality in the stakes. "Gold for silver." Such are the terms; and the old players, to do them justice, those who have lost and won many a heavy wager, are generally careful to begin at least by venturing the commoner metal. But even of these the discretion is not to be trusted as the game goes on. Touched by the magic rod, maddened by the spell against which Wisdom is often less proof than Folly, the sternest and the sagest will throw their gold about as recklessly as if every piece

were not stamped with the impress of their honour and their happiness, precious as the very drops of life-blood at their heart.

Perhaps it is wiser to stick to any other pursuit in the world than the one in question; but if you must needs sit down to this "beggar-my-neighbour" kind of amusement, is it better to lose or to win? to give or accept the gold for silver passing so freely from hand to hand? Will you have the satisfaction hereafter of standing on the higher ground? of feeling you have nothing to reproach yourself with, nothing to be ashamed of? or will you take comfort in reflecting that while the storm raged above your head you had been careful to shelter cunningly from the blast? Will you exult in your forethought, your philosophy, the accurate knowledge of human nature, that has preserved you scatheless through the combat? or will you take pride

in your generosity, your magnanimity, and the self-devoted courage that bids you accept the stab of ingratitude in addition to the pain of neglect? It depends entirely on character and temperament.

Men and women vary so much in this, as in every other phase of feeling. The latter, when they do take the more generous view of their position—when they can bring themselves to choose "the better part," accept it, I think, with a more complete abandonment of *pique* than the former. Perhaps their pride is of a nobler order: no doubt their vanity is less egotistical than our own. With us, except in the highest natures—and these, as has been well remarked, have ever a leavening of the feminine element in their organization—there is always something of irritation left after a wound of the affections has healed up—something that stings and rankles, and looks to reprisals of one kind or

another for relief. I have read an old tale of chivalry so thoroughly exemplifying this state of feeling, and affording so natural an example of the changes and counterchanges with which gold and silver are staked against each other in the dangerous game, that I cannot forbear quoting it here.

"A certain knight had long loved a damsel at the court of the King of France; but she, albeit, accepting the service of none other, treated him with such coldness and *duresse*, that he at length obtained the title of the 'Patient Knight,' and she of the 'Scornful Ladye.' In vain he sat at her feet in hall; in vain wore her colours in the lists; in vain added to his cognizance the motto '*Sans espérance*,' above the representation of a dungeon-grate, to signify the hopelessness of his captivity. She looked upon him coldly as the winter moon looks on a frozen lake: she turned from him pitilessly

as the bending poplar turns from the south wind, whispering its longing and its sorrows, wooing her even with its tears.

"So minstrels sang in their lays of his constancy, and knights marvelled at his subjection, and ladies pitied—it may be despised him also a little for his long-suffering: but still the 'Patient Knight' struck hard and shouted high for the renown of her he loved; and still the 'Scornful Ladye' accepted his homage, and took credit for his deeds-of-arms with scant courtesy, and cruel neglect, and high imperious disdain.

"So the King bade his knights and nobles to a feast; and because there was to be a solemn passage-of-arms held on the morrow, he entertained them with a fight of wild beasts in the Carrousel, whereon lords and ladies looked down in safety from the galleries above. But many a soft cheek grew

pale none the less, when a lion and a tiger were let loose to battle for their lives.

"Now even while they glared on each other ere they closed, the 'Scornful Ladye' dropped her glove between the beasts of prey. Quoth she, with a mocking smile, ''An I had a bachelor here who loved me well, he would fetch me back this glove that the wind hath blown from my hand.'

"Then the 'Patient Knight' made no more ado, but drew his good sword and leapt lightly down into the Carrousel, where he picked the glove from the earth, and returning scatheless to his place, laid it in silence at her feet.

"Then the 'Scornful Ladye' wept sweet and happy tears; for his great love had conquered at last, and she would follow him meekly now to the end of the world.

"But she shed bitter tears on the morrow, when he rode into the lists with another s

sleeve in his helmet, another's colours on his housings, and his shield blazoned with the fresh device of a broken fetter and the motto, '*Tout lasse—tout casse—tout passe!*'"

So, you see, these adversaries changed places at last; and you will probably be of opinion that the Knight had the best of it in the end.

Perhaps it "served her right." And yet to me it seems that there may come a time when to have given gold for silver in every relation of life shall be the one consoling reflection that enables us to quit it without misgivings for the future, without regret for the past,—a time perhaps of hushed voices, stealthy footsteps, and a darkened room, growing yet strangely darker with every breath we draw. Or a time of eager comrades, trampling squadrons, short sharp words of command, a bugle sounding the Advance, a cocked-hat glancing through

the smoke; a numb sick helplessness that glues the cheek into the dust where it has fallen, and a roll of musketry, feebler, farther, fainter, and more confused, till its warlike echoes die out in the hush of another world. Or a time of earth-stained garments, and bespattered friends proffering silver hunting-flasks in sheer dismay, and a favourite horse brought back with flying stirrups, dangling rein, and its mane full of mud, while the dull grey sky wheels above, and the dank, tufted grass heaves below, nor in the intervals of a pain, becoming every moment less keen, can we stifle the helpless consciousness that before our crushed frame shall be lifted from its wet, slippery resting-place, it will be time to die.

At such moments as these, I say, to have given gold for silver, while we could, can surely be no matter of regret.

I recollect a quaint old tombstone—I beg

your pardon for the allusion—on which I once read the following inscription :—

"What I spent I *had*—what I saved I *lost*—what I gave I *have*."

Surely this sentiment will bear analysing. "What I spent I *had*." I enjoyed it, wasted it, got rid of it: derive from it now as much enjoyment as can ever be extracted from past pleasures of which self-indulgence was the motive—that is to say, none at all! "What I saved I *lost*." Undoubtedly. Mortgages, Consols, building-leases, railway scrip—it was locked up in securities that I could by no means bring with me here. It has been an error of judgment, a bad speculation, a foolish venture, a dead loss. "But what I gave I *have*." Ah! There I did good business: took the turn of the market; invested my capital in a bank that pays me cent. per cent., even now; and this, not only for the dross we

call money, but for the real treasures of the heart—affection, kindliness, charity, help to the needy, sympathy with the sorrowful, protection to the weak, and encouragement to the forlorn. The silver I had in return has been left long ago on earth: perhaps there was barely enough to make a plate for my coffin; but the gold I gave is in my own possession still, and has been beaten into a crown for me in heaven.

Yes. "It is better to give than to receive." With few exceptions the great benefactors of mankind have been in this world defrauded of their wages. Columbus died perhaps the poorest man in the whole kingdom he had spent his life-time to enrich. Socrates sold the treasures of his intellect—the deductions of the greatest mind in antiquity—for a draught of hemlock on a prison floor. The fable of Prometheus has been enacted over and over again. Those

who scale the heavens that they may bring down fire to enlighten and comfort their fellow-men, must not hope to escape the vulture and the rock. I have always thought that wondrous story the deepest and the most suggestive in the whole heathen mythology. Its hero was the first discoverer, the first free-thinker, the first reformer. He was even proof against the seductions of woman, and detected in Pandora's box the multiplicity of evils that secured the presence of Hope within its compass, and prevented her flying back to the heaven whence she came. The only Olympian deity he would condescend to worship was the Goddess of Wisdom; and she it was who taught her votary to outwit Jupiter, the great principle of what may be termed physical nature. By science man baffles the elements, or renders them subservient to his purpose. He was a herbalist,

a doctor, a meteorologist, and universal referee for gods and men. He taught the latter all the arts necessary to extort a livelihood from the earth; showed them how to yoke their oxen and bridle their steeds. He was wise, laborious, provident, and paternal—the first philosopher, the great benefactor of his time, and—his reward was to lie in chains on Mount Ætna with a vulture sheathing her beak in his heart.

Can we not see in this heathen parable some glimmering of the Great Hope which was never entirely obscured to the ancient world?—some faint foresight of, some vague longing after, the great Example which has since taught its holy lesson of self-abnegation and self-sacrifice? It is not for me to enlarge on a topic so sacred and so sublime. Enough for us and such as we are, if by lavishing gold for silver freely on our

brother, we can cast but one humble mite into the treasury of our God.

There is much talk in the world about ingratitude. People who do good to others at cost or inconvenience to themselves are apt to expect a great flow of thanks, a great gush of sentiment in return. They are generally disappointed. Those natures which feel benefits the most deeply are often the least capable of expressing their feelings, and a speechless tongue is with them the result of a full heart. Besides, you are sure to be repaid for a good action at some time or another. Like seed sown in the Nile, "the bread cast upon the waters," it may not come back to you for many days, but come back at last it most certainly *will*. Would you like your change in silver or in gold? Will you have it in a few graceful, well-chosen expressions, or in the sterling coin of silent love with its daily thoughts and

nightly prayers; or, better still even than these, will you waive your claim to it down here, and have it carried to your account above? I am supposing yours is not one of those natures which have arrived at the highest, the noblest type of benevolence, and give their gold neither for silver nor for copper, but freely without return at all. To these I can offer no encouragement, no advice. Their grapes are ripened, their harvest is yellow, the light is already shining on them from the golden hills of heaven.

CHAPTER VI.

A DAY THAT IS DEAD.

I HAVE been burning old letters to-night; their ashes are fluttering in the chimney even now; and, alas! while they consume, fleeting and perishable like the moments they record, "each dying ember" seems to have "wrought its ghost" upon my heart. Oh! that we could either completely remember or completely forget. Oh! that the image of Mnemosyne would remain close enough for us to detect the flaws in her imperishable marble, or that she would re-

move herself so far as to be altogether out of sight. It is the golden haze of "middle distance" that sheds on her this warm and tender light. She is all the more attractive that we see her through a double veil of retrospection and regret, none the less lovely because her beauty is dimmed and softened in a mist of tears.

Letter after letter, they have flared, and blackened, and shrivelled up. There is an end of them—they are gone. Not a line of those different handwritings shall I ever see again. The bold, familiar scrawl of the tried friend and more than brother; why does he come back to me so vividly to-night? The stout heart, the strong arm, the brave, kind face, the frank and manly voice. We shall never tread the stubble nor the heather side by side again; never more pull her up against the stream, nor float idly down in the hot summer noons to catch the light air

off the water on our heated faces; to discourse, like David and Jonathan, of all and everything nearest our hearts. Old friend! old friend! wherever you are, if you have consciousness you must surely sometimes think of *me*; I have not forgotten *you*. I cannot believe you have forgotten me even *there*.

And the pains-taking, up-and-down-hill characters of the little child—the little child for whom the angels came so soon, yet found it ready to depart, whose fever-wasted lips formed none but words of confidence and affection, whose blue eyes turned their last dim, dying looks so fondly on the face it loved.

And there were letters harder to part with than these. Never mind, they are burnt and done with; letters of which even the superscription once made a kind heart leap with pleasure so intense it was

almost pain; letters crossed and re-crossed in delicate, orderly lines, bearing the well-known cipher, breathing the well-known perfume, telling the old, false tale in the old, false phrases, so trite and worn-out, yet seeming always so fresh and new.

The hand that formed them has other tasks to occupy it now; the heart from which they came is mute and cold. Hope withers, love dies—times are altered. What would you have? It is a world of change. Nevertheless this has been a disheartening job; it has put me in low spirits; I must call "Bones" out of his cupboard to come and sit with me.

"What is this charm?" I ask him, "that seems to belong so exclusively to the past?—this 'tender grace of a day that is dead?' and must I look after it down the gulf into which it has dropped with such irrepressible longing only because it will

never come back to me? Is a man the greater or wiser that he lived a hundred years ago or a thousand? Are reputations, like wine, the mellower and the more precious for mere age, even though they have been hid away in a cellar all the time? Is a thing actually fairer and better because I have almost forgotten how it looked when present, and shall never set eyes on it again? I entertain the greatest aversion to Horace's *laudator temporis acti*, shall always set my face against the superstition that 'there were giants in those days;' and yet wherever I went in the world previous to my retirement here that I might live with you, I found the strange maxim predominate, that everything was very much better before it had been improved!

"If I entered a club and expressed my intention of going to the Opera, for instance, whatever small spark of enthusiasm I could

kindle was submitted to a wet blanket on the spot. 'Good heavens!' would exclaim some venerable philosopher of the Cynic and Epicurean schools, 'there *is* no opera now, nor *ballet* neither. My good sir, the thing is done; it's over. We haven't an artist left. Ah! you should have seen Taglioni dance; you should have heard Grisi sing; you should have lived when Plancus was consul. In short, you should be as old as I am, and as disgusted, and as gouty, and as disagreeable!'

"Or I walked into the smoking-room of that same resort, full of some athletic gathering at Holland Park, some 'Varsity hurdle-race, some trial of strength or skill amongst those lively boys the subalterns of the Household Brigade; and ere I could articulate 'brandy and soda' I had Captain Barclay thrown body and bones in my face. Walk, sir! You talk of walking?' (I

didn't, for there had been barely time to get a word in edgeways, or my parable would have exhausted itself concerning a running high leap.) 'But there is nothing like a real pedestrian left; they don't breed 'em, sir, in these days: can't grow them, and don't know how to train them if they could! Show me a fellow who would make a match with Barclay to-day Barclay, sir, if he were alive, would walk all your best men down after he came in from shooting. Ask your young friends which of 'em would like to drive the mail from London to Edinburgh without a greatcoat! I don't know what's come to the present generation. It must be the smoking, or the light claret, perhaps. They're done, they're used up, they're washed out. Why, they go to covert by railway, and have their grouse driven to them on a hill! What would old Sir Tatton or Osbaldeston say to such doings

as these? I was at Newmarket, I tell you, when the Squire rode his famous match—two hundred miles in less than nine hours! I saw him get off old Tranby, and I give you my honour the man looked fresher than the horse! Don't tell me. He was rubbed down by a couple of prize-fighters (there were real bruisers in those days, and the best man used to win), dressed, and came to dinner just as *you* would after a five-mile walk. Pocket Hercules, you call him—one in a thousand? There were hundreds of such men in my day. Why, I recollect in Tom Smith's time that I myself——'

"But at this point I used to make my escape, because there are two subjects on which nobody is so brilliant as not to be prolix, so dull as not to be enthusiastic—his doings in the saddle and his adventures with the fair. To honour either of these triumphs he blows a trumpet-note loud and

long in proportion to the antiquity of the annals it records. Why must you never again become possessed of such a hunter as Tally-Ho? Did that abnormal animal really carry you as well as you think, neither failing when the ground was deep nor wavering when the fences were strong? Is it strictly true that no day was ever too long for him? that he was always in the same field with the hounds? And have not the rails he rose at, the ditches he covered so gallantly, increased annually in height and depth and general impossibility ever since that fatal morning when he broke his back, under the Coplow in a two-foot drain?

"You can't find such horses now? Perhaps you do not give them so liberal a chance of proving their courage, speed, and endurance.

"On the other topic it is natural enough. I dare say, for you to 'yarn' with all the

more freedom that there is no one left to contradict. People used enormous coloured silk handkerchiefs in that remote period, when you threw yours with such Oriental complacency, and the odalisques who picked it up are probably to-day so old and stiff they could not bend their backs to save their lives. But were they really as fond, and fair, and faithful as they seem to you now? Had they no caprices to chill, no whims to worry, no rivals on hand, to drive you mad? Like the sea, those eyes that look so deep and blue at a distance, are green and turbid and full of specks when you come quite close. Was it all sunshine with Mary, all roses with Margaret, all summer with Jane? What figures the modern women make of themselves, you say. How they offend your eye, those bare cheek-bones, those clinging skirts, those hateful *chignons!* Ah! the cheeks no longer hang out a danger-signal

when you approach; the skirts are no more lifted, ever such a little, to make room for you in the corner of the sofa next the fire; and though you might have had locks of hair enough once to have woven a parti-coloured *chignon* of your own, it would be hopeless now to beg as much as would make a finger-ring for Queen Mab. What is it, I say, that causes us to look with such deluded eyes on the past? Is it sorrow or malice, disappointment or regret? Are our teeth still on edge with the sour grapes we have eaten or forborne? Do we glower through the jaundiced eyes of malevolence, or is our sight failing with the shades of a coming night?"

Bones seldom delivers himself of his opinion in a hurry. "I think," he says very deliberately, "that this, like many other absurdities of human nature, originates in that desire for the unattainable

which is, after all, the mainspring of effort, improvement, and approach towards perfection. Man longs for the impossible, and what is so impossible as the past? That which hath vanished becomes therefore valuable, that which is hidden attractive, that which is distant desirable./ There is a strange lay still existing by an old Provençal troubadour, no small favourite with iron-handed, lion-hearted King Richard, of which the refrain, '*so far away*,' expresses very touchingly the longing for the absent, perhaps only *because* absent, that is so painful, so human, and so unwise. The whole story is wild and absurd to a degree, yet not without a saddened interest, owing to the mournful refrain quoted above. It is thus told in the notes to Warton's 'History of English Poetry:'—

"'Jeffrey Rudell, a famous troubadour of Provence, who is also celebrated by Petrarch,

had heard from the adventurers in the Crusades the beauty of a Countess of Tripoli highly extolled. He became enamoured from imagination, embarked for Tripoli, fell sick on the voyage through the fever of expectation, and was brought on shore at Tripoli, half-expiring. The countess, having received the news of the arrival of this gallant stranger, hastened to the shore and took him by the hand. He opened his eyes, and at once overpowered by his disease and her kindness, had just time to say inarticulately that *having seen her he died satisfied.* The countess made him a most splendid funeral and erected to his memory a tomb of porphyry inscribed with an epitaph in Arabian verse. She commanded his sonnets to be richly copied and illuminated with letters of gold, was seized with a profound melancholy, and turned nun. I will endeavour to translate one of the

sonnets he made on his voyage, "Yret et dolent m'en partray," &c. It has some pathos and sentiment. "I should depart pensive but for this love of mine *so far away*, for I know not what difficulties I may have to encounter, my native land being *so far away*. Thou who hast made all things and who formed this love of mine *so far away*, give me strength of body, and then I may hope to see this love of mine *so far away*. Surely my love must be founded on true merit, as I love one *so far away*. If I am easy for a moment, yet I feel a thousand pains for her who is *so far away*. No other love ever touched my heart than this for her *so far away*. A fairer than she never touched any heart, either so near or *so far away*."'

"It is utter nonsense, I grant you, and the doings of this love-sick idiot seem to have been in character with his stanzas, yet

is there a mournful pathos about that wailing *so far away* which, well-worded, well-set, and well-performed, would make the success of a drawing-room song.

"If the Countess of Tripoli, who seems also to have owned a susceptible temperament, had been his cousin and lived next door, he would probably not have admired her the least, would certainly never have wooed her in such wild and pathetic verse; but he gave her credit for all the charms that constituted his own ideal of perfection, and sickened even to death for the possession of his distant treasure, simply and solely because it was *so far away!*

"What people all really love is a dream. The stronger the imagination the more vivid the phantom that fills it; but on the other hand, the waking is more sudden and more complete. If I were a woman instead of a—a—specimen, I should beware how I set

my heart upon a man of imagination, a quality which the world is apt to call genius, with as much good sense as there would be in confounding the sparks from a blacksmith's anvil with the blacksmith himself. Such a man takes the first doll that flatters him, dresses her out in the fabrications of his own fancy, falls down and worships, gets bored, and gets up, pulls the tinsel off as quick as he put it on; being his own he thinks he may do what he likes with it, and finds any other doll looks just as well in the same light and decked with the same trappings. Narcissus is not the only person who has fallen in love with the reflection, or what he believed to be the reflection, of himself. Some get off with a ducking, some are drowned in sad earnest for their pains.

"Nevertheless, as the French philosopher says, 'There is nothing so real as illusion.' The day that is dead has for men a more

actual, a more tangible, a more vivid identity than the day that exists, nay, than the day as yet unborn. One of the most characteristic and inconvenient delusions of humanity is its incapacity for enjoyment of the present. Life is a journey in which people are either looking forward or looking back. Nobody has the wisdom to sit down for half an hour in the shade listening to the birds overhead, examining the flowers under foot. It is always 'How pleasant it was yesterday! What fun we shall have to-morrow!' Never 'How happy we are to-day!' And yet what *is* the past, when we think of it, but a dream vanished into darkness—the future but an uncertain glimmer that may never brighten into dawn.

"It is strange how much stronger in old age than in youth is the tendency to live in the hereafter. Not the real hereafter of

another world, but the delusive hereafter of this. Tell a lad of eighteen that he must wait a year or two for anything he desires very eagerly, and he becomes utterly despondent of attaining his wish; but an old man of seventy is perfectly ready to make arrangements or submit to sacrifices for his personal benefit to be rewarded in ten years' time or so, when he persuades himself he will still be quite capable of enjoying life. The people who purchase annuities, who plant trees, who breed horses for their own riding, are all past middle age. Perhaps they have seen so many things brought about by waiting, more particularly when the deferred hope had caused the sick heart's desire to pass away, that they have resolved for them also must be 'a good time coming,' if only they will have patience and 'wait a little longer.' Perhaps they look forward because they cannot bear to look back.

Perhaps in such vague anticipations they try to delude their own consciousness, and fancy that by ignoring and refusing to see it they can escape the inevitable change. After all, this is the healthiest and most invigorating practice of the two. Something of courage seems wanting in man or beast when either is continually looking back. To the philosopher 'a day that is dead' has no value but for the lesson it affords; to the rest of mankind it is inestimably precious for the unaccountable reason that it can never come again."

"Be it so," I answered; "let me vote in the majority. I think with the fools, I honestly confess, but I have also a theory of my own on this subject, which I am quite prepared to hear ridiculed and despised. My supposition is that ideas, feelings, delusions, name them how you will, recur in cycles, although events and tangible

bodies, such as we term realities, must pass away. I cannot remember in my life any experience that could properly be called a new sensation. When in a position of which I had certainly no former knowledge I have always felt a vague, dreamy consciousness that something of the same kind must have happened to me before. Can it be that my soul has existed previously, long ere it came to tenant this body that it is so soon about to quit? Can it be that its immortality stretches both ways, as into the future so into the past? May I not hope that in the infinity so fitly represented by a circle, the past may become the future as the future most certainly must become the past, and the day that is dead, to which I now look back so mournfully, may rise again newer, fresher, brighter than ever in the land of the morning beyond that narrow paltry gutter which we call the grave?" I

waited anxiously for his answer. There are some things we would give anything to know, things on which certainty would so completely alter all our ideas, our arrangements, our hopes, and our regrets. Ignorant of the coast to which we are bound, its distance, its climate, and its necessities, how can we tell what to pack up and what to leave behind? To be sure, regarding things material, we are spared all trouble of selection; but there is yet room for much anxiety concerning the outfit of the soul. For the space of a minute he seemed to ponder, and when he did speak all he said was this—

"I know, but I must not tell," preserving thereafter an inflexible silence till it was time to go to bed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FOUR-LEAVED SHAMROCK.

WE are all looking for it; shall we ever find it? Can it be cultivated in hothouses by Scotch head-gardeners with high wages and Doric accent? or shall we come upon it accidentally, peeping through green bulrushes, lurking in tangled woodlands, or perched high on the mountain's crest, far above the region of grouse and heather, where the ptarmigan folds her wings amongst the shilt and shingle in the clefts of the bare grey rock? We climb for it, we dive for it, we

creep for it on our belly, like the serpent, eating dust to any amount in the process; but do we ever succeed in plucking such a specimen as, according to our natures, we can joyfully place in our hats for ostentation or hide under our waistcoats for true love?

Do you remember Sir Walter Scott's humorous poem called the "Search after Happiness?" Do you remember how that eastern monarch who strove to appropriate the shirt of a contented man visited every nation in turn till he came to Ireland, the native soil indeed of all the shamrock tribe; how his myrmidons incontinently assaulted one of the "bhoys' whose mirthful demeanour raised their highest hopes, and how

"Shelelagh, their plans was well-nigh after baulking,
Much less provocation will set it a-walking;
But the odds that foiled Hercules foiled Paddywhack.
They floored him, they seized him, they stripped him, alack!
Up, bubboo! *He hadn't a shirt to his back!*"

Mankind has been hunting the four-leaved shamrock from the very earliest times on record. I believe half the legends of mythology, half the exploits of history, half the discoveries of science, originate in the universal search. Jason was looking for it with his Argonauts when he stumbled on the Golden Fleece; Columbus sailed after it in the track of the setting sun, scanning that bare horizon of an endless ocean, day after day, with sinking heart, yet never-failing courage, till the land-weeds drifting round his prow, the land-birds perching on his spars, brought him their joyous welcome from the undiscovered shore; Alexander traversed Asia in his desire for it; Cæsar dashed through the Rubicon in its pursuit; Napoleon well-nigh grasped it after Austerlitz, but the frosts and fires of Moscow shrivelled it into nothing ere his hand could close upon the prize. To find it sages have

ransacked their libraries, adepts exhausted their alembics, misers hoarded up their gold. It is not twined with the poet's bay-leaves, nor is it concealed in the madman's hellebore. People have been for it to the Great Desert, the Blue Mountains, the Chinese capital, the interior of Africa, and returned empty-handed as they went. It abhors courts, camps, and cities; it strikes no root in palace nor in castle; and if more likely to turn up in a cottage-garden, who has yet discovered the humble plot of ground on which it grows?

Nevertheless, undeterred by warning, example, and the experience of repeated failures, human nature relaxes nothing of its persevering quest. I have seen a dog persist in chasing swallows as they skimmed along the lawn; but then the dog had once caught a wounded bird, and was therefore acting on an assured and tried experience of its own.

If you or I had ever found one four-leaved shamrock, we should be justified in cherishing a vague hope that we might some day light upon another.

The Knights of the Round Table beheld with their own eyes that vision of the Holy Vessel, descending in their midst, which scattered those steel-clad heroes in all directions on the adventure of the Sangreal; but perhaps the very vows of chivalry they had registered, the very exploits they performed, originated with that restless longing they could not but acknowledge in common with all mankind for possession of the four-leaved shamrock.

"And better he loved, that monarch bold,
On venturous quest to ride
In mail and plate, by wood and wold,
Than with ermine trapped and cloth of gold
In princely bower to bide.
The bursting crash of a foeman's spear
As it shivered against his mail,
Was merrier music to his ear
Than courtier's whispered tale.

And the clash of Caliburn more dear,
When on hostile casque it rung,
Than all the lays to their monarch's praise
The harpers of Reged sung.
He loved better to bide by wood and river
Than in bower of his dame Queen Guenever;
For he left that lady, so lovely of cheer,
To follow adventures of danger and fear,
And little the frank-hearted monarch did wot
That she smiled in his absence on brave Launcelot."

Oh! those lilting stanzas of Sir Walter's, how merrily they ring on one's ear, like the clash of steel, the jingling of bridles, or the measured cadence of a good steed's stride! We can fancy ourselves spurring through the *mêlée* after the "selfless stainless" king, or galloping with him down the grassy glades of Lyonesse on one of his adventurous quests for danger, honour, renown—and—the four-leaved shamrock.

Obviously it did not grow in the tilt-yards at Caerleon or the palace gardens of Camelot; nay, he had failed to find it in the posy lovely Guenevere wore on her bosom. Alas!

that even Launcelot, the flower of chivalry, the brave, the courteous, the gentle, the sorrowing and the sinful, must have sought for it there in vain.

Everybody begins life with a four-leaved shamrock in view, an ideal of his own, that he follows up with considerable wrong-headedness to the end. Such fiction has a great deal to answer for in the way of disappointment, dissatisfaction, and disgust. Many natures find themselves completely soured and deteriorated before middle age, and why? Because, forsooth, they have been through the garden with no better luck than their neighbours. I started in business, we will say, with good connections, sufficient capital, and an ardent desire to make a fortune. Must I be a saddened, morose, world-wearied man because missing that un accountable rise in muletwist, and taking the subsequent fall in grey shirtings too late, I

have only realised a competency, while Bullion, who didn't want it, made at least twenty thou.? Or I wooed Fortune as a soldier, fond of the profession, careless of climate, prodigal of my person, ramming my head wherever there was a chance of having it knocked off, "sticking to it like a leech, sir; never missing a day's duty, by Jove! while other fellows were getting on the staff, shooting up the country, or going home on sick leave." So I remain nothing but an overworked field-officer, grim and grey, with an enlarged liver, and more red in my nose than my cheeks, while Dawdle is a major-general commanding in a healthy district, followed about by two aides-de-camp, enjoying a lucrative appointment with a fair chance of military distinction. Shall I therefore devote to the lowest pit of Acheron the Horse Guards, the War Office, H.R.H. the Commander-in-Chief, and the service of Her

Majesty the Queen? How many briefless barristers must you multiply to obtain a Lord Chancellor, or even a Chief Baron? How many curates go to a bishop? How many village practitioners to a fashionable doctor in a London-built brougham? Success in every line, while it waits, to a certain extent, on perseverance and capacity, partakes thus much in the nature of a lottery, that for one prize there must be an incalculable number of blanks.

I will not go so far as to say that you should abstain from the liberal professions of arts or arms, that you should refrain from taking your ticket in the lottery, or in any way rest idly in mid-stream, glad to

> "Loose the sail, shift the oar, let her float down,
> Fleeting and gliding by tower and town;"

but I ask you to remember that the marshal's baton can only be in one conscript's knapsack out of half a million; that wigs

and mitres, and fees every five minutes, fall only to one in ten thousand; that although everybody has an equal chance in the lottery, that chance may be described as but half a degree better than the cipher which represents zero.

There is an aphorism in everybody's mouth about the man who goes to look for a straight stick in the wood. Hollies, elms, oaks, ashes, and alders he inspects, sapling after sapling, in vain. This one has a twist at the handle, that bends a little towards the point; some are too thick for pliancy, some too thin for strength. Several would do very well but for the abundant variety that affords a chance of finding something better. Presently he emerges at the farther fence, having traversed the covert from end to end, but his hands are still empty, and he shakes his head, thinking he may have been over-fastidious in his choice. A straight stick is

no easier to find than would be a four-leaved shamrock.

The man who goes to buy a town house or rent a place in the country experiences the same difficulty. Upstairs and downstairs he travels, inspecting kitchen-ranges, sinks and sculleries, attics, bedrooms, boudoirs, and housemaids' closets, till his legs ache, his brain swims, and his temper entirely gives way. In London, if the situation is perfect, there is sure to be no servants' hall, or the accommodation below-stairs leaves nothing to be desired, but he cannot undertake to reside so far from his club. These difficulties overcome, he discovers the butler's pantry is so dark no servant of that fastidious order will consent to stay with him a week. In the country, if the place is pretty the neighbourhood may be objectionable: the rent is perhaps delightfully moderate, but he must keep up the grounds and pay the wages

of four gardeners. Suitable in every other respect, he cannot get the shooting; or if no such drawbacks are to be alleged, there is surely a railway through the park, and no station within five miles. Plenty of shamrocks grow, you see, of the trefoil order, green, graceful, and perfectly symmetrical. It is that fourth leaf he looks for, which creates all his difficulties.

The same with the gentleman in search of a horse, the same with Cœlebs in search of a wife. If the former cannot be persuaded to put up with some little drawback of action, beauty, or temper, he will never know that most delightful of all partnerships, the sympathy existing between a good horseman and his steed. If the latter expects to find a perfection really exist, which he thinks he has discovered while dazzled by the glamour surrounding a man in love, he deserves to be disappointed, and he generally is. Rare,

rare indeed are the four-leaved shamrocks in either sex; thrice happy those whom Fate permits to win and wear them even for a day!

What is it we expect to find? In this matter of marriage more than in any other our anticipations are so exorbitant that we cannot be surprised if our "come-down" is disheartening in proportion.

> "Where is the maiden of mortal strain
> That may match with the Baron of Triermain?
> She must be lovely, constant, and kind,
> Holy and pure, and humble of mind," &c.

(How Sir Walter runs in my head to-night.) Yes, she must be all this, and possess a thousand other good qualities, many more than are enumerated by Iago, so as never to descend for a moment from the pedestal on which her baron has set her up. Is this indulgent? is it even reasonable? Can he expect any human creature to be always

dancing on the tight-rope? Why is Lady Triermain not to have her whims, her temper, her fits of ill-humour, like her lord? She must not indeed follow his example and relieve her mind by swearing "a good, round, mouth-filling oath," therefore she has the more excuse for feeling at times a little captious, a little irritable, what she herself calls a little *cross*. Did he expect she was an angel? Well, he often called her one, nay, she looks like it even now in that pretty dress, says my lord, and she smiles through her tears, putting her white arms round his neck so fondly that he really believes he *has* found what he wanted till they fall out again next time.

Men are very hard in the way of exaction on those they love. All "take" seems their motto, and as little "give" as possible. If they would but remember the golden rule and expect no more than should be expected from themselves, it might be a better world

for everybody. I have sometimes wondered in my own mind whether women do not rather enjoy being coerced and kept down. I have seen them so false to a kind heart, and so fond of a cruel one. Are they slaves by nature, do you conceive, or only hypocrites by education? I suppose no wise man puzzles his head much on that subject. They are all incomprehensible and all alike!

"How unjust!" exclaims Bones, interrupting me with more vivacity than usual. 'How unsupported an assertion, how sweeping an accusation, how unfair, how unreasonable, and how like a *man!* Yes, that is the way with every one of you; disappointed in a single instance, you take refuge from your own want of judgment, your own mismanagement, your own headlong stupidity, in the condemnation of half the world! You open a dozen oysters, and turn away disgusted

because you have not found a pearl. You fall an easy prey to the first woman who flatters you, and plume yourself on having gained a victory without fighting a battle. The fortress so easily won is probably but weakly garrisoned, and capitulates ere long to a fresh assailant. When this has happened two or three times, you veil your discomfiture under an affectation of philosophy and vow that women are all alike, quoting perhaps a consolatory scrap from Catullus—

'Quid levius plumâ? pulvis. Quid pulvere? ventus.
Quid vento? mulier. Quid mulière? nihil?'

But Roman proverbs and Roman philosophy are unworthy and delusive. There *is* a straight stick in the wood if you will be satisfied with it when found; there *is* a four-leaved shamrock amongst the herbage if you will only seek for it honestly on your knees. Should there be but one in a hundred women,

nay, one in a thousand, on whom an honest heart is not thrown away, it is worth while to try and find her. At worst, better be deceived over and over again than sink into that deepest slough of depravity in which those struggle who, because their own trust has been outraged, declare there is no faith to be kept with others; because their own day has been darkened, deny the existence of light."

"You speak feelingly," I observe, conscious that such unusual earnestness denotes a conviction he will get the worst of the debate. "You have perhaps been more fortunate than the rest. Have *you* found her, then, this hundredth woman, this prize, this pearl, this black swan, glorious as the phœnix and rare as the dodo? Forgive my *argumentum ad hominem*, if I may use the expression, and forgive my urging that such good fortune only furnishes one of those

exceptions which, illogical people assert, prove the rule." There is a vibration of his teeth wanting only lips to become a sneer, while he replies—

"In my own case I was *not* so lucky, but I kept my heart up and went on with my search to the end."

"Exactly," I retort in triumph; "you, too, spent a lifetime looking for the four-leaved shamrock, and never found it after all. But I think women are far more unreasonable than ourselves in this desire for the unattainable, this disappointment when illusion fades into reality. Not only in their husbands do they expect perfection, and that too in defiance of daily experience, of obvious incompetency, but in their servants, their tradespeople, their carriages, their horses, their rooms, their houses, the dinners they eat, and the dresses they wear. With them an avowal of incapacity to reconcile impossi

bilities stands for wilful obstinacy, or sheer stupidity at best. They believe themselves the victims of peculiar ill-fortune if their coachman gets drunk, or their horses go lame; if milliners are careless or ribbons unbecoming; if chimneys smoke, parties fall through, or it rains when they want to put on a new bonnet. They never seem to understand that every 'if' has its 'but,' every *pro* its *con.* My old friend, Mr. Bishop, of Bond Street, the Democritus of his day (and may he live as long!), observed to me many years ago, when young people went mad about the polka, that the new measure was a type of everything else in life, 'What you gain in dancing you lose in turning round.' Is it not so with all our efforts, all our undertakings, all our noblest endeavours after triumph and success? In dynamics we must be content to resign the *maximum* of one property that we may preserve the

indispensable *minimum* of another, must allow for friction in velocity, must calculate the windage of a shot. In ethics we must accept fanaticism with sincerity, exaggeration with enthusiasm, over-caution with unusual foresight, and a giddy brain with a warm, impulsive heart. What we take here we must give yonder; what we gain in dancing we must lose in turning round!

"But no woman can be brought to see this obvious necessity. For the feminine mind nothing is impracticable. Not a young lady eating bread and butter in the school-room but cherishes her own vision of the prince already riding through enchanted forests in her pursuit. The prince may turn out to be a curate, a cornet, or a count, a duke or a dairy-farmer, a baronet or a blacking-maker, that has nothing to do with it. Relying on her limitless heritage of the possible, she feels she has a prescriptive right

to the title, the ten thousand a year, the matrimonial prize, the four-leaved shamrock. Whatever else turns up, she considers herself an ill-used woman for life, unless all the qualities desirable in man are found united in the person and fortunes of her husband; nay, he must even possess virtues that can scarce possibly coexist. He must be handsome and impenetrable, generous and economical, gay and domestic, manly but never from her side, wise yet deferring to her opinion in all things, quick-sighted, though blind to any drawbacks or shortcomings in herself. Above all, must he be superlatively content with his lot, and unable to discover that by any means in his matrimonial venture, 'what he gained in dancing he has lost in turning round.'

"I declare to you I think if Ursidius*

* "Cogitat Ursidius, sibi dote jugare puellam,
Ut placeat domino, cogitat Ursidius."

insists on marrying at all, that he had better select a widow; at least he runs at even weights against his predecessor, who, being a man, must needs have suffered from human weakness and human infirmities. The chances are that the dear departed went to sleep after dinner, hated an open carriage, made night hideous with his snores under the connubial counterpane, and all the rest of it. A successor can be no worse, may possibly appear better; but if he weds a maiden, he has to contend with the female ideal of what a man *should* be! and from such a contest what can accrue but unmitigated discomfiture and disgrace?

"Moreover, should he prove pre-eminent in those manly qualities women most appreciate, he will find that even in those they prefer to accept the shadow for the substance, consistently mistaking assertion for argument, volubility for eloquence, obstinacy for

resolution, bluster for courage, fuss for energy, and haste for speed.

"On one of our greatest generals, remarkable for his gentle, winning manner in the drawing-room as for his cool daring in the field, before he had earned his well-merited honours, I myself heard this verdict pronounced by a jury of maids and matrons, 'Dear! he's such a quiet creature, I'm sure he wouldn't be *much use in a battle!*' No: give them Parolles going to recover his drum, and they have a champion and a hero exactly to their minds, but they would scarcely believe in Richard of the Lion-Heart if he held his peace and only set his teeth hard when he laid lance in rest.

"Therefore it is they tug so unmercifully at the slender thread that holds a captive, imagining it is by sheer strength the quiet creature must be coerced. Some day the pull is harder than usual, the thread breaks,

and the wild bird soars away, free as the wind down which it sails, heedless of lure and whistle, never to return to bondage any more. Then who so aghast as the pretty, thoughtless fowler, longing and remorseful, with the broken string in her hand?

"She fancied, no doubt, her prisoner was an abnormal creature, rejoicing in ill-usage; that because it was docile and generous it must therefore be poor in spirit, slavish in obedience, and possessing no will of its own. She thought she had found a four-leaved shamrock, and this is the result!

"But I may talk for ever and end where I began. Men you *may* convince by force of argument, if your logic is very clear and your examples or illustrations brought fairly under their noses; but with the other sex, born to be admired and not instructed, you might as well pour water into a sieve. Can you remember a single instance in which

with these, while a word of entreaty gained your point forthwith, you might not have exhausted a folio of argument in vain?"

He thinks for a minute, and then answers deliberately, as if he had made up his mind—

"I never knew but one woman who could understand reason, *and she wouldn't listen to it!*"

CHAPTER VIII.

RUS IN URBE.

ROMÆ *Tibur Amem, ventosus. Tibure Romam!* quoth the Latin satirist, ridiculing his own foibles, like his neighbour's, with the laughing, half-indulgent banter that makes him the pleasantest, the chattiest, and the most companionable of classic writers. How he loved the cool retirement of his Sabine home, its grassy glades, its hanging woodlands, its fragrant breezes wandering and whispering through those summer slopes,

rich in the countless allurements of a landscape that—

"Like Albunea's echoing fountain,
All my inmost heart hath ta'en;
Give me Anio's headlong torrent,
And Tiburnus' grove and hills,
And its orchards sparkling dewy,
With a thousand wimpling rills,"

as Theodore Martin translates his Horace, or thus, according to Lord Ravensworth—

"Like fair Albunea's sybil-haunted hall,
By rocky Anio's echoing waterfall,
And Tibur's orchards and high-hanging wood,
Reflected graceful in the whirling flood."

His lordship, you observe, who can himself write Latin lyrics as though he had drunk with Augustus, and capped verses with Ovid, makes the second syllable of Albunea long, and a very diffuse argument might be held on this disputed quantity. Compare these with the original, and say which you like best—

"Quam domus Albuneæ resonantis,
Et præceps Anio ac Tiburni lucus et uda
Mobilibus pomaria rivis."

By the way, nobody who has not endeavoured to render Latin poetry into English can appreciate the vigour and terseness of the older language. Here are six lines in the one version and four in the other, required to translate three of the original, perhaps without producing after all so full a meaning or so complete a picture.

Nevertheless and notwithstanding his poetical predilections for the country, Horace, like many other people, seems of his two homes to have always preferred the one at which he was *not*. An unhappy prejudice little calculated to enhance the comfort and content of daily life.

Had he settled anywhere in the neighbourhood of our hermitage here, he need not have accused himself of this fickle longing, which he denounces by the somewhat lu-

dicrous epithet of "ventose." He might have combined the advantages of town and country, alternating the solitude of the desert with the society of his fellow-men, blowing the smoke out of his lungs while inhaling the fresh breezes off the Serpentine, stretching his own limbs and his horses' by walks and rides round Battersea, Victoria, and Hyde Parks.

If you look for *rus in urbe*, where will you find it in such perfection as within a mile of the Wellington Statue in almost any direction you please to take? If you choose to saunter on a hot June day towards the Ranger's Lodge or the powder magazine, I could show you a spot from which I defy you to see houses, spires, gas-towers, or chimneys, anything, indeed, but green grass and blue sky, and towering elms motionless, in black massive shade, or quivering in golden gleams of light. A spot where

you might lie and dream of nymph and faun, woodgod and satyr, Daphne pursued by Phœbus, Actæon flying before Diana, of Pan and Syrinx and Echo, and all the rustic joys of peaceful Arcady—or of elves and brownies, fair princesses and cruel monsters, Launcelot, Mordred, and Carodac, Sir Gawain the courteous with his "lothely ladye," the compromising cup, the misfitting mantle, all the bright pageantry, quaint device, and deep, tender romance that groups itself round good King Arthur and the Knights of his Round Table—or of Thomas the Rhymer as he lay at length under the "linden tree," and espied, riding towards him on a milk-white palfrey, a dame so beautiful, that he could not but believe she was the mother of his lord, till undeceived by her own confession, he won from her the fatal gift of an unearthly love. And here, perhaps, you branch off into some more recent vision,

some dream of an elfin queen of your own, who also showed you the path to heaven, and gave you an insight into the ways of purgatory, ere she beckoned you down the road to Fairyland, that leads — ah! who knows where? From this sequestered nook you need not walk a bowshot to arrive at the seaboard of the Serpentine; and here, should there be a breath of air, if you have any taste for yachting, you may indulge it to your heart's content. The glittering water is dotted with craft of every rig and, under a certain standard, of almost every size. Yawls, cutters, schooners, barques, brigs, with here and there a three-masted ship. On a wind and off a wind, close-hauled and free, rolling, pitching, going about, occasionally missing stays, and only to be extricated from the "doldrums" by a blundering, over-eager water-dog, the mimic fleet, on its mimic ocean, carries out its

illusion so completely that you can almost fancy the air off the water feels damp to your forehead, and tastes salt upon your lips.

An ancient mariner who frequents the beach below the boat-house feels, I am convinced, thoroughly persuaded that his occupation is strictly professional, that he is himself a necessity, not of amusement, but business. He will tell you that when the wind veers round like that, "suddenways, off Kensington Gardens, you may look out for squalls;" that "last Toosday was an awful wild night, and some on 'em broke from their moorings afore he could turn out. The 'Bellerophon,' bless ye, was as nigh lost as could be, and that there 'Water Lily,' the sweetest thing as ever swam—she sprang her boom, damaged her bowsprit, and broke her nose. He was refitting all Wens'day, he was, up to two o'clock, and a precious job he had!"

Every one who constantly "takes his walks abroad," in the Great City, becomes a philosopher in spite of himself, of the Peripatetic School, no doubt, but still a philosopher; so you sympathise mildly with the mariner's troubles; for to you no human interests are either great or small, nor does one pursuit nor person bore you more than another. You hazard an opinion, therefore, that the "Water Lily" is somewhat too delicate and fragile a craft to encounter boisterous weather, even on such an inland sea as this, and find, to your dismay, that so innocent an observation stamps you in his opinion as not only ignorant, but presumptuous. He considers her both "wholesome," as he calls it, and "weatherly," urging on you many considerations of sea-worthiness, such as her false keel, her bulwarks, her breadth of beam, and general calibre. "Why, she's seven-and-twenty," says he, rolling a

peppermint lozenge round his tongue, just as a real seaman turns a quid; "now look at the 'Sea-sarpent' lying away to the eastward yonder, just beyond the point where the gravel's been washed adrift. She's fifty-two, she is, but I wouldn't trust her, not in lumpy water, you know, like the schooner. No. If I was a building of one now, what I call, for all work and all weathers, thirty would be my mark, or from that to thirty-five at the outside!"

"Thirty-five what? Tons?" you ask, a little abashed, and feeling you have committed yourself.

"Tons!" he repeats, in a tone of intense disgust—"tons be blowed! h'inches! I should have thought any landsman might ha' knowed that—h'inches!" and lurching sulkily into his cabin under the willow-tree, disappears to be seen no more.

Later, when September has begun to

tinge the topmost twigs with gold, and autumn, like a beautiful woman, then indeed at her loveliest, who is just upon the wane, dresses in her deepest colours, and her richest garments, go roaming about in Kensington Gardens, and say whether you might not fancy yourself a hundred miles from any such evidences of civilization as a pillar-post or a cab-stand.

It was but the other day, I sauntered through the grove that stands nearest the Uxbridge Road, and while an afternoon mist limited my range of vision and deadened the sounds of traffic on my ears, I could hardly persuade myself that in less than five minutes I might if I liked make the thirteenth in an omnibus.

Alone? you ask—of course I was. Yet, stay, not quite alone, for with me walked the shadow, that, when we have learned to prefer solitude to society, accompanies us in

all our wanderings, teaching us, I humbly hope, the inevitable lesson, permanent and precious in proportion to the pain with which the poor scholar gets his task by heart.

Well—I give you my word, the endless stems, the noiseless solitude, the circumscribed horizon, reminded me of those forest ranges in North America that stretch interminable from the waters of the St. Ann's and the Batsicon, to the wild waves breaking dark and sullen on the desert seaboard of Labrador.

I am not joking. I declare to you I was once more in mocassins, blanket-coat and *bonnet-rouge*, with an axe in my belt, a pack on my shoulders, and a rifle in my hand, following the track of the *treborgons* * on snow-shoes, in company with Thomas, the

* A narrow board, on which provisions, &c., are packed, to be dragged through the woods on these expeditions in the snow.

French Canadian, and François, the Half-breed, and the Huron Chief with a name I could never pronounce, that neither I nor any man alive can spell. Ah! it was a merry life we led on those moose-hunting expeditions, in spite of hard work, hard fare, and, on occasion, more than a sufficiency of the discomfort our retainers called expressively *misère*. There was a strange charm in the marches through those silent forests, across those frozen lakes, all clothed alike in their winter robe of white and diamonds. There was a bold, free, joyous comfort in the hole we dug through a yard and a half of snow, wherein to build our fire, boil our kettle, fry our pork (it is no use talking of such things to you, but I was going to say, never forget a frying-pan on these expeditions; it is worth all the kitchen-ranges in Belgravia), to smoke our tobacco, ay, and to take our rest.

There was something of sweet adventurous romance in waking at midnight to see the stars flash like brilliants through the snow-encrusted branches overhead, wondering vaguely where and why and what were all those countless worlds of flame. Perhaps to turn round again and dream of starry eyes in the settlements, then closed in sleep, or winking drowsily at a night-light, while the pretty watcher pondered, not unmindful of ourselves, pitying us, it may be, couching here in the bush, and thinking in her ignorance how cold we were!

Then when we reached our hunting-ground and came up with our game at last, though, truth to tell, the sport as sport was poor enough, there was yet a wild delightful triumph in overtaking and slaying a gigantic animal that had never seen the face of man. The chase was exciting, invigorating, bracing; the idea grand, heroic, Scandinavian.

"An elk came out of the pine-forest;
He snuffed up east, he snuffed up west,
Stealthy and still;
His mane and his horns were shaggy with snow,
I laid my arrow across my bow,
Stealthily and still;
The bowstring rattled—the arrow flew,
And it pierced his blade-bone through and through,
Hurrah!
I sprang at his throat like a wolf of the wood,
And I dipped my hands in the smoking blood,
Hurrah!'"

Kingsley had not written "Hypatia" then. Kingsley never went moose-hunting in his life. How could he so vividly describe the gait and bearing of a forest-elk stalking warily, doubtfully, yet with a kingly pride through his wintry haunts? Probably from the instinctive sense of fitness, the intuition peculiar to poets, that enabled him to feel alike with a fierce Goth sheltering in his snow-trench, and a soft, seductive southern beauty, languishing, lovely and beloved, in spite of dangerous impulses and tarnished fame, in spite of wilful heart, reckless self-

abandonment, woman weakness, and the fatal saffron shawl.

I tell you that I could not have been more completely alone in Robinson Crusoe's island than I found myself here within a rifle-shot of Kensington Palace, during a twenty minutes' walk, to and fro, up and down, threading the stems of those tall, metropolitan trees; nor when my solitude was at last disturbed could I find it in me to grudge the intruders their share of my retreat. More especially as they were themselves thoroughly unconscious of everything but their own companionship, sauntering on, side by side, with murmured words, and loving looks, and steps that dwelt and lingered on the path, because that impossible roses seemed springing into bloom beneath their very feet, and that for them Kensington Gardens were indeed as the gardens of Paradise

I knew right well for *me* the mist was gathering round, ghostly and damp and chill. It struck through my garments, it crept about my heart, but for these, thank God! the sky was bright as a Midsummer noon. They were basking in the warmth and light of those gleams that come once or twice in a life-time to remind us of what we might be, to reproach us, perhaps, gently for what we are. They did not speak much, they laughed not at all. Their conversation seemed a little dull, trite, and commonplace, yet I doubt if either of them has forgotten a word of it yet. It was pleasant to observe how happy they were, and I am sure they thought it was to last for ever. Indeed I wish it may!

But the reflections of a man on foot are to those of a man on horseback as the tortoise to the hare, the mouse to the lion, tobacco to opium, chalk to cheese, prose to poetry.

"As moonshine is to sunshine, and as water is to wine."

Get into the saddle, leap on a thoroughbred horse, if you have got one. Never mind his spoiling you for every other animal of meaner race, and come for a "spin" up the Ride from Hyde Park Corner to Kensington Gate, careful only to steady him sufficiently for the safety of Her Majesty's subjects, and the inquisition, not very rigorous, of the policemen on duty. For seven months in the year at least this is perhaps the only mile and a half in England over which you may gallop without remorse for battering legs and feet to pieces on the hard ground. Away you go, the breeze lifting your whiskers from the very roots (I forgot, you have no whiskers, nor indeed would such superfluities be in character with the severe style of your immortal beauty). Never mind, the faster you gallop the keener and cooler comes the air. Sit well down, just feel him on the curb, let him shake his pretty head and play

with his bridle, sailing away with his hind legs under your stirrup-irons, free, yet collected, so that you could let him out at speed, or have him back in a canter within half a dozen strides; pat him lovingly just where the hair turns on his glossy neck like a knot in polished wood-work, and while he bends to meet the caress, and bounds to acknowledge it, tell me that dancing is the poetry of motion if you dare!

Should it not be the London season—and I am of opinion that the *rus in urbe* is more enjoyable to both of us at the "dead time of year" than during the three fashionable months—do not, therefore, feel alarmed that you will have the ride to yourself, or that if you come to grief there will be nobody to pick you up! Here you will meet some Life-Guardsman "taking the nonsense" out of a charger he hates; there some fair girl, trim of waist, blue of habit, and golden of

chignon, giving her favourite "a breather," ready and willing to acknowledge that she is happier, thus, speeding along in her side-saddle, than floating round a ball-room to Coote and Tinney's softest strains with the best waltzer in London for a partner.

But your horse has got his blood up, and you yourself feel that rising within, which reminds you of the merry youthful days, when everything in life was done, so to speak, at a gallop. You long to have *a lark* —you cannot settle down without a jump or two at least. You look wistfully at the single iron rail that guards the footway, but refrain: and herein you are wise. Nevertheless, you shall not be disappointed; you have but to jog quietly out of the Park, through Queen's Gate, turning thereafter to your right, and within a quarter of a mile you shall find what you require. Yes, in good truth, our *rus in urbe*, to be the more

complete, is not without a little hunting-ground of its own. Mr. Blackman has laid out a snug enclosure, walled in on all sides and remote from observation, where man and horse may disport themselves with no more fear of being crowded and jostled than in Launde Woods or Rockingham Forest during the autumnal months. Here you will find every description of fence in miniature, neat and new and complete, like the furniture in a doll's baby-house—a little hedge, a little ditch, a little double, and a very little gate, cunningly constructed on mechanical principles so as to let you off easily should you tamper with its top bar, the whole admirably adapted to encourage a timid horse or steady a bold one.

All this is child's-play, no doubt—the merest child's-play, compared with the real thing. Yet there is much in the association of ideas; and a round or two over this mimic

country cannot but bring back to you the memory of the merriest, ay, and the *happiest*, if not the *sweetest* moments of your life. Mounted, with a good start, in a grass country, after a pack of foxhounds, there is no discord in the melody, no bitter in the cup—your keenest anxiety the soundness of the level water-meadow, your worst misgiving the strength of the farther rail, the width of the second ditch. The goddess of your worship bids your pulses leap and your blood thrill, but never makes your heart ache, and the thorns that hedge the roses of Diana can only pierce skin-deep.

Wasn't it glorious, though you rode much heavier then than you do now,—wasn't it glorious, I say, to view a gallant fox going straight away from Lilburne, Loatland Wood, Shankton Holt, John-o'-Gaunt, or any covert you please to name that lies in the heart of a good-scenting, fair-fenced,

galloping country? Yourself, sheltered and unseen, what keen excitement to mark his stealing, easy action, gliding across the middle of the fields, nose, back, and brush carried in what geometricians call a "right" line, to lead you over what many people would call a "serious" one! A chorus ringing from some twenty couple of tongues becomes suddenly mute, and the good horse beneath you trembles with delight while the hounds pour over the fence that bounds the covert, scattering like a conjuror's pack of cards, ere they converge in the form of an arrow, heads and sterns down, racing each other for a lead, and lengthening out from the sheer pace at which a burning scent enables them to drive along!

They have settled to it now. You may set to and ride without compunction or remorse. A dozen fields, as many fences, a friendly gate, and they have thrown their

heads up in a lane. Half-a-score of sportsmen, one plastered with mud, and the huntsman now come up; you feel conscious, though you know you are innocent, that *he* thinks you have been driving them! You remark, also, that there is more red than common in the men's faces and the horses' nostrils; both seem to be much excited and a little blown.

The check, however, is not of long duration. Fortunately, the hounds have taken the matter in hand for themselves, ere the only person qualified to do so has had time to interfere. *Rarpsody*, as he calls her, puts her nose down and goes off again at score. You scramble out of the lane, post-haste, narrowly escaping a fall. Your horse has caught his wind with that timely pull. He is going as bold as a lion, as easy as a bird, as steady as a rock. You seem to have grown together, and move like one creature

to that long swinging stride, untiring and regular as clock-work. A line of grass is before you, a light east wind in your face, two years' condition and the best blood of Newmarket in his veins render you confident of your steed's enduring powers, while every field as he swoops over it, every fence as he throws it lightly behind him, convinces you more and more of his speed, mettle, and activity. What will you have? The pleasures of imagination, at least, are unlimited. Shall it be two-and-twenty minutes up wind and to ground as hard as they can go? Shall it be thirty-five without another check, crossing the best of the Vale, and indulging the good horse with never a pull till you land in the field where old Rhapsody, with flashing eyes and bristles all on end, runs into her quarry, rolling him over and herself with him, to be buried in the rush of her eager worrying followers? Would you prefer

twelve miles from point to point, accomplished in an hour and a half, comprising every variety of country, every vicissitude of the chase, and ending only when the crows are hovering and swooping over a staunch, courageous, travel-wearied fox, holding on with failing strength but all-undaunted spirit for the forest that another mile would reach but that he is never to see again. You may take your choice. Holloa! he has disappeared!—he has taken refuge in his cupboard. Not even such a skeleton as mine can sustain the exorcism of so powerful a spell as fox-hunting! So be it! Who whoop! Gone to ground? I think we will leave him there for the present. It is better not to dig him out!

CHAPTER IX.

HAUNTED.

A HUNDRED years ago there was scarce a decent country house in England or Scotland that did not pride itself on two advantages—the inexhaustible resources of its cellar and the undoubted respectability of its ghost. Whether the generous contents of the one had not something to do with the regular attendance of the other, I will not take upon me to decide; but in those times hall, castle, manor-house, and even wayside inn were haunted every one. The phantoms used to

be as various, too, as the figures in a pantomime. Strains of unaccountable music sometimes floated in the air. Invisible carriages rolled into courtyards at midnight, and doorbells rang loudly, pulled by unearthly visitors, who were heard but never seen. If you woke at twelve o'clock you were sure to find a nobleman in court-dress, or a lady in farthingale and high-heeled shoes, warming a pair of ringed and wasted hands at the embers of your wood-fire; failing these, a favourite sample of the supernatural consisted of some pale woman in white garments, with her black hair all over her shoulders and her throat cut from ear to ear. In one instance I remember a posting-house frequented by the spirit of an ostler with a wooden leg; but perhaps the most blood-chilling tale of all is that which treats of an empty chamber having its floor sprinkled with flour to detect the traces of its mysterious visitant, and the

dismay with which certain horror-stricken watchers saw footsteps printing themselves off, one by one, on the level spotless surface—footsteps plain and palpable, but of the Fearful Presence nothing more!

As with houses in those, so is it with men in these days. Most of the people I have known in life were haunted: so haunted, indeed, that, for some the infliction has led at last to madness, though, in most instances, productive only of abstracted demeanour, wandering attention, idiotic cross-purposes, general imbecility of intellect, and, on occasion, reckless hilarity with quaint, wild, incoherent talk. These haunted head-pieces, too, get more and more dilapidated every day; but how to exorcise them, that is the difficulty! What spells shall have power to banish the evil spirit from its tenement, and lay it in the Red Sea? if, indeed, that is the locality to which phantoms should properly

be consigned. Haunted men are, of all their kind, the most unhappy; and you shall not walk along a London street without meeting them by the dozen.

The dwelling exclusively on one idea, if not in itself an incipient symptom, tends to produce, ere long, confirmed insanity. Yet how many people have we seen going about with the germs of so fearful a calamity developing into maturity! This man is haunted by hope, that by fear,—others by remorse, regret, remembrance, desire, or discontent. Each cherishes his ghost with exceeding care and tenderness, giving it up, as it were, room after room in the house, till by degrees it pervades the whole tenement, and there is no place left for a more remunerative lodger, healthy, substantial, and real. I have seen people so completely under the dominion of expectation, that in their morbid anticipation of the Future, they could no

more enjoy the pleasures afforded by the Present than the dead. I have known others for whom the brightest sunshine that ever shone was veiled by a cloud of apprehension, lest storms should be lurking below their horizon the while, who would not so much as confess themselves happy because of a conviction such happiness was not to last,—and for whom time being—as is reasonable —only temporal could bring neither comfort nor relief. It is rarer to find humanity suffering from the tortures of remorse, a sensation seldom unaccompanied, indeed, by misgivings of detection and future punishment; still, when it does fasten on a victim, this Nemesis is of all others the most cruel and vindictive. Regret, however, has taken possession of an attic, in most of our houses, and refuses obstinately to be dislodged. It is a quiet, well-behaved ghost enough, interfering but little with the ordinary occupations

of the family, content to sit in a dark corner weeping feebly and wringing its hands, but with an inconvenient and reprehensible tendency to emerge on special occasions of rejoicing and festivity, to obtrude its unwelcome presence when the other inmates are gladdened by any unusual beauty of sight or sound.

Discontent, perhaps, should hardly be dignified with the title of a ghost. He resembles rather those Brownies and Lubbers of northern superstition, who, unsightly and even ludicrous in appearance, were not yet without their use in performing the meaner offices of a household. If properly treated and never dragged into undue notice, the Brownie would sweep up the hearth, bring in the fuel, milk the cows, and take upon him the rough work generally, in an irregular, uncouth, but still tolerably efficient style. So perhaps a spirit of discontent,

kept within proper bounds, may prove the unsuspected mainspring of much useful labour, much vigorous effort, much eventual success. The spur is doubtless a disagreeable instrument to the horse, and its misapplication has lost many a race ere now; but there is no disputing that it can rouse into action such dull torpid temperaments as, thus unstimulated, would never discover their own powers nor exert themselves to do their best.

But I should draw a wide distinction between the discontent which instigates us to improve our lot, and the desire, the *desiderium*, the poisonous mixture of longing and sorrow, defiance and despair, which bids us only rend our garments, scatter ashes on our heads, and sit down in the dust unmanly to repine. It is the difference between the Brownie and the Fiend. Of all evil spirits I think this last is the most fatal, the most

accursed. We can none of us forget how our father Abraham, standing at his tent-door on the plains of Mamre, entertained three angels unawares. And we, too, his descendants, are always on the look out for the visitors from heaven. Do they ever tarry with any of us for more than a night's lodging? Alas! that the very proof of our guest's celestial nature is the swiftness with which he vanishes at daybreak like a dream. But oftener the stranger we receive, though coming from another world, is not from above. His beauty, indeed, seems angelic, and he is clad in garments of light. For a while we are glad to be deceived, cherishing and prizing our guest, the more perhaps for those very qualities which should warn us of his origin. So we say to him, "Thou art he for whom we have been looking. Abide with us here for ever." And he takes us at our word.

Henceforth the whole house belongs to the ghost. When we go to dinner, he sits at the head of the table. Try to shame him away with laughter, and you will soon know the difference between mirth and joy. Try to drown him with wine. No. Don't try that. It is too dangerous an experiment, as any doctor who keeps a private mad-house will tell you. Our duties we undertake hopelessly and languidly, because of his sneer, which seems to say, "What is the use? Am I not here to see that you reap no harvest from your labour, earn no oblivion with your toil?" And for our pleasures—how can we have any pleasures in that imperious presence, under the lash of that cruel smile?

Even if we leave our home and walk abroad, in hope to free ourselves from the tenacious incubus, it is in vain. There is beauty in the outside world, quiet in the calm distant skies, peace in the still summer

evening, but not for us—nevermore for us—

> "Almost upon the western wave
> Rested the broad bright sun,
> When that strange shape drove suddenly
> Betwixt us and the sun."

Ay, therein lurks our curse. We bear the presence well enough when cold winds blow and snow falls, or when all the landscape about is bleak and bare and scathed by bitter frosts. The cruel moment is that in which we feel a capability of enjoyment still left but for our affliction, a desire to bask in his rays, a longing to turn our faces towards his warmth—

> "When that strange shape drives suddenly
> Betwixt us and the sun."

There is no exorciser from without who can help us. Alas! that we can so seldom help ourselves. The strength of Hercules could not preserve the hero from his ghastly fate.

Our ghost is no more to be got rid of by main force than was Dejanira's fatal tunic, clinging, blistering, wrapping its wearer all the closer, that he tore away the smarting flesh by handfuls. Friends will advise us to make the best of it, and no doubt their counsel is excellent though gratuitous, wanting indeed nothing but the supplementary information, how we are to make the best of that which is confessedly at its worst. Enemies opine that we are weak fools, and deserve to be vanquished for our want of courage—an argument that would hold equally good with every combatant overpowered by superior strength; and all the time the ghost that haunted us sits aloft, laughing our helplessness to scorn, cold, pitiless, inexorable, and always

"Betwixt us and the sun."

If we cannot get rid of him, he will sap

our intellects and shorten our lives; but there is a spell which even this evil spirit has not power to withstand, and it is to be found in an inscription less imitated perhaps than admired by the "monks of old."

"*Laborare est orare*," so runs the charm. Work and worship, and a stern resolve to ignore his presence, will eventually cause this devil to "come out of the man." Not, be sure, till he has torn and rent him cruelly —not till he has driven him abroad to wander night and day amongst the tombs, seeking rest, poor fevered wretch, and finding none, because of his tormentor—not till, in utter helplessness and sheer despair, stunned, humbled, and broken-hearted, the demoniac has crept feebly to the Master's feet, will he find himself delivered from his enemy, weary, sore, and wasted, but "clothed, and in his right mind."

Amongst the many ghost stories I have

read there is one of which I only remember that it turned upon the inexplicable presence of a window too much in the front of a man's house. This individual had lately taken a farm, and with it a weird, long-uninhabited dwelling in which he came to reside. His first care, naturally enough, was to inspect the building he occupied, and he found, we will say, two rooms on the second floor, each with two windows. The rooms were close together, and the walls of not more than average thickness. It was some days ere he made rather a startling discovery Returning from the land towards his own door, and lifting the eyes of proprietorship on his home, he counted on the second story *five* windows in front instead of four ! The man winked and stared and wondered. Knowing he was not drunk, he thought he must be dreaming, and counted them over again—still with the same result. Entering his

house, he ran up-stairs forthwith, and made a strict investigation of the second floor. There were the two rooms, and there were the four windows as usual. Day after day he went through the same process, till by degrees his wonder diminished, his apprehensions vanished; his daily labour tired him so that he could have slept sound in a grave-yard, and by the time his harvest was got in, the subject never so much as entered his head.

Now this is the way to treat the haunted chamber in our own brain. Fasten its door; if necessary brick up its window. Deprive it of air and light. Ignore it altogether. When you walk along the passage never turn your head in its direction, no, not even though the dearest hope of your heart lies dead and cold within; but if duty bids you, do not shrink from entering—walk in boldly! Confront the ghost, and show it that you have

ceased to tremble in its presence. Time after time the false proportions, once so ghastly and gigantic, will grow less and less—some day the spectre will vanish altogether. Mind, I do not promise you another inmate. While you live the tenement will probably remain bare and uninhabited; but at the worst an empty room is surely better than a bad lodger! It is difficult, you will say, thus to ignore that of which both head and heart are full. So it is. Very difficult, very wearisome, very painful, yet not impossible! Make free use of the spell. Work, work, till your brain is so overwrought it cannot think, your body so tired it must rest or die. Pray, humbly, confidingly, sadly, like the publican, while your eyes can hardly keep open, your hands droop helpless by your side, and your sleep shall be sound, holy, unhaunted, so that with to-morrow's light you may rise to the unremitting task once more.

Do not hope you are to gain the victory in a day. It may take months. It may take years. Inch by inch, and step by step, the battle must be fought. Over and over again you will be worsted and give ground, but do not therefore yield. Resolve never to be driven back quite so far as you have advanced. Imperceptibly, the foe becomes weaker, while you are gaining strength. The time will come at last, when you can look back on the struggle with a half-pitying wonder that he could ever have made so good a fight. Do not then forget to be grateful for the aid you prayed so earnestly might be granted at your need; and remember also, for your comfort, that the harder won the victory, the less likely it is you will ever have to wage such cruel battle again.

"Would it not be wiser," observed Bones, quietly, "never to begin the conflict? Not

to take possession of the haunted house at all?"

There is a pseudo-philosophy about some of his remarks that provokes me intensely.

"Would it not be wiser," I repeated, in high disdain, "to sit on the beach than put out to sea, to walk a-foot than ride on horseback, to loll on velvet cushions in the gallery, than go down under shield into the lists, and strike for life, honour, and renown? No. It would *not* be wiser. True wisdom comes by experience. He who shrinks from contact with his fellow-men—who fears to take his share of their burdens, their sorrows, their sufferings is but a poor fool at best. He may be learned in the learning of the schools, but he is a dunce in all that relates to 'the proper study of mankind;' he is ignorant of human nature, its sorrows, its passions, its feelings, its hidden vein of gold, lying under a thick crust of selfishness

and deceit; above all, he knows nothing of his inmost heart, nothing of the fierce, war-like joy in which a bold spirit crushes and tramples out its own rebellion—nothing of that worshipper's lofty courage who

> 'Gives the first watch of the night
> To the red planet Mars,'

who feels a stern and dogged pride in the consciousness that he

> 'Knows how sublime a thing it is
> To suffer and be strong.'

No: in the moral as in the physical battle, though you be pinned to the earth, yet writhe yourself up against the spear, like the 'grim Lord of Colonsay,' who, in his very death-pang, swung his claymore, set his teeth, and drove his last blow home.

"Besides, if you are to avoid the struggle entirely, how are you ever to learn the skill of self-defence, by which a thrust may be parried

or returned? the art of tying an artery or stanching a wound? How are you to help others who cannot help yourself? A man is put into this world to do a certain share of the world's work; to stop a gap in the world's fencing; to form a cog, however minute, in the world's machinery. By the defalcation even of the humblest individual, some of its movements must be thrown out of gear. The duty is to be got through, and none of us, haunted or unhaunted, ghost or no ghost, may shirk our share. Stick to your post like a Roman soldier during the watches of the night. Presently morning will come, when every phantom must vanish into air, every mortal confront that inevitable reality for which the dream we call a lifetime is but a novitiate and a school."

CHAPTER X.

WEIGHT CARRIERS.

FIFTY years ago, when the burning of a bishop at Smithfield would scarce have created more sensation in clerical circles than a Ritualistic Commission or a Pan-Anglican Synod, our divines took their share of secular pastime far more freely than at present. It was the parson who killed his thirty brace of partridges, and this, too, with a flint-and-steel gun, over dogs of his own breaking, on the broiling 1st of September. It was the parson who alone got to the end of that

famous five-and-forty minutes from "The Church Spinneys," when a large field were beat off to a man, and the squire broke his horse's back. It was the parson who knew more about rearing pheasants, circumventing wild ducks, otter-hunting, fly-fishing, even rat-catching, than any one else in the parish; and it was the parson, too, who sometimes took the odds about a flyer at Newmarket, and landed a good stake by backing his own sound ecclesiastical opinion.

Concerning one of these racing divines I remember the following anecdote:—

Returning from afternoon service on a Sunday, he happened to witness a trial of speed between two of his school-children. Unequally matched in size, the big boy, as was natural, beat the little one, but only by a couple of yards. The parson stood still, watched them approvingly, and meditated.

"Come here," said he to the winner. "Go into my study, and fetch me my big Bible."

The urchin obeyed, and returned bearing a ponderous quarto volume. "Now," continued his reverence, "start fair, and run it over again."

The competitors wished no better fun, and finished this time with a dead heat.

"Good boys! Good boys!" said the parson, reflectively. "Ah! I thought the weight would bring you together."

Yes; how surely the weight brings us together! How often have we not seen the universal handicap run out over the course of daily life? Some of us start so free, so lighthearted, so full of hope and confidence, expecting no less than to gallop in alone. Presently the weight begins to tell; the weight that we have voluntarily accepted, or the weight imposed on us by the wis-

dom of superior judgment. We labour, we struggle, we fail; we drop back to those whom we thought so meanly of as our competitors; they reach us, they pass us, and though punishment be not spared, they gain the post at last, perhaps many, many lengths ahead! And even if we escape the disgrace of having thus to succumb, even if our powers be equal to the tax imposed on them, we are not to expect an easy victory; there is no "winning in a canter" here. Every effort tells on mettle, nerve, and spirits; on heart, body, and brain. We want them all, we summon them, we use them freely, and then, it may be within one stride of victory, comes the cruel and irretrievable breakdown.

Men, like horses, must be content to carry weight. Like horses, too, though some are far more adapted than others to the purpose, all learn in time to accommodate themselves,

so to speak, in pace and action to their inevitable burden. How they fight under it at first! How eager, and irritable, and self-willed it renders them; how violent and impetuous, as if in haste to get the whole thing over and done with. But in a year or two the back accustoms itself to the burden; the head is no longer borne so high, the proud neck bends to the curb, and though the stride be shortened, the dashing, bird-like buoyancy gone for ever, a gentle, docile temper has taken its place, with sufficient courage and endurance for all reasonable requirements left. Neither animal, indeed, is ever so brilliant again; but thus it is that both become steady, plodding, useful creatures, fit to perform honestly and quietly their respective duties in creation.

We think we know a great deal in England of athletics, pedestrianism, and the art of training in general. It may astonish us

to learn how a Chinese postman gets himself into condition for the work he has to do. The Celestials, it would appear, like meaner mortals, are extremely particular, not to say fidgety, about the due transmission of their correspondence. Over that vast empire extend postal arrangements, conducted, I believe, as in our own country, by some mandarin of high rank, remarkable for their regularity and efficiency. The letters travel at a uniform rate of more than seven English miles an hour; and as they are conveyed by runners on foot, often through thinly-populated districts in which it is impossible to establish frequent relays, the pedestrian capabilities of these postmen are of the greatest importance. This is how a Chinaman prepares himself to accomplish his thirty miles in less than four hours.

He has a quantity of bags constructed,

which he disposes over his whole person, like Queen Mab's pinches—

"Arms, legs, back, shoulders, sides, and shins."

Into these he dribbles handfuls of flour before he starts for walking exercise, increasing the quantity little by little every day till the bags are quite full, and he carries clinging to every part of his body several pounds of dead weight, nor considers himself fit for his situation till he can move under it with the freedom and elasticity of a naked man. He will then tell you that, on throwing off his self-imposed burden, he finds all his muscles so invigorated by their own separate labours, his strength so stimulated, his wind so clear, his condition so perfect, that he shoots away over the plains, mountains, and tea-gardens of the Flowery Land less like John Chinaman with a letter-bag than an arrow from a bow. What would our old friend Captain Barclay, of

peripatetic memory, say to such a system as this?

I doubt if the Chinaman's theory of training be founded on sound principles; but I am quite sure that in bearing our moral burden we cannot dispose it over too extended a surface, or in too many separate parcels. I see fathers of families carrying surprising weights, such as make the bachelor's hair stand on end from sheer dismay, with a buoyancy of step and carelessness of demeanour only to be accounted for by an equal distribution of pressure over the entire victim. A man who has his own business to attend to, his domestic affairs to regulate, half a dozen hungry children to feed, and a couple of poor relations or so to assist with sympathy, counsel, and occasional aid, finds no time to dwell upon any one difficulty, no especial inconvenience from any one burden, because each has its

fellow and its counterpoise elsewhere. It is not only in pharmacy that the principle of counter-irritation produces beneficial results. A man with two grievances never pities himself so much as a man with one; and a man with half a dozen treats them all with a good-humoured indifference little removed from positive satisfaction.

Some people even appear to glory in the multitude of their afflictions, as though the power to sustain so much ill-luck shed a certain reflected lustre on themselves. I recollect, long ago, meeting an old comrade hanging about the recruiting taverns in Westminster. The man was a clean, smart, active, efficient non-commissioned officer enough, with the average courage and endurance of the British dragoon. A year before I had parted with him, languid, unhappy, and depressed, longing only to return to England, but not yet under orders

for home. Now he looked cheerful, contented, almost radiant. I stopped to inquire after his welfare.

"I landed a fortnight ago, sir," said he with something of triumph in his voice, "and a happy home I found waiting for me! I haven't a friend or a relation left in the world. My father's absconded, my mother's dead, my brother-in-law's ruined, and my sister gone into a madhouse!"

It sounded melancholy enough, yet I felt convinced the man reaped some unaccountable consolation from his pre-eminence in misfortune, admired his own endurance, and was proud of his power to carry so heavy a weight.

Custom, no doubt, in these as in all other inflictions, will do much to lighten the load. There is a training of the mind, as of the body, to bear and to endure. With wear and tear the heart gets hardened like the

muscles, and the feelings become blunted by ill-usage, just as the skin grows callous on an oarsman's hands. There is some shadow of truth in the fallacious story of him who carried a calf every day till it became a cow. None of us know what we can do till we try; and there are few but would follow the example of the patient camel, and refuse to rise from the sand, if they knew how heavy a weight is to be imposed on them ere they can reach the longed-for diamond of the desert, gushing and glittering amongst the palms! It is fortunate for us that the packages are not all piled up at once. Little by little we accustom ourselves to the labour as we plod sullenly on with the tinkling caravan, ignorant, till too late to turn back, of the coming hardships, the endless journey, or the many times that cruel *mirage* must disappoint our fainting, thirsting spirits ere we

reach the welcome resting-place where the cool spring bubbles through its fringe of verdure—where we shall drink our fill of those life-bestowing waters, and stretch ourselves out at last for long, unbroken slumbers under the "shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

But the worst method of all in which to carry our load is to build it up on the pack-saddle so as to attract notice and commiseration from those who travel alongside. The Turkish *hamals,* indeed, may be seen staggering about Constantinople under enormous bales of merchandise, twice the height and apparently three times the weight of the herculean bearer; but a Turkish *hamal,* notwithstanding his profession, ignores the meaning of a sore back, moral or physical. Other jades may wince, but, under all circumstances, you may swear *his* withers are unwrung. To be sure, the first article of

his creed is resignation. Fatalism lulls him like opium, though, kinder than that pernicious drug, it leaves no torment of reaction to succeed its soothing trance. Hard work, hard fare, hard bed, hard words, hard lines in general, a tropical sun and the atmosphere of a jungle, it is all in the day's work with *him!* *Backsheesh* he will accept with a smile if he can get it, or he will do without, consoling himself that it is *kismet*, for "There is one God, and Mahomet is his prophet." With this philosopher, indeed, "a contented mind is a perpetual feast," otherwise how could he sustain his stalwart proportions on a morsel of black bread and a slice of water-melon? His dissipations, too, are mild as his daily meals. A screw of weak tobacco, folded in a paper cigarette, wraps him in a foretaste of his anticipated paradise; a mouthful of thick, black, bitter coffee stands him in lieu of beer, porter,

half-and-half, early purl, blue ruin, and dog's-nose. Once a week, or maybe once a month, he goes to the bath for two hours of uninterrupted enjoyment, emerging healthy, happy, refreshed, and clean as a new pin.

Perhaps it is his frugal, temperate life, perhaps it is his calm, acquiescent disposition, that enables him thus to carry weight so complacently. He never fights under it, not he! Through the narrow lanes of Stamboul, across the vibrating wooden bridge of the Golden Horn, up the filthy stairs, not streets, of Pera, he swings along with regulated step and snorting groans, delivered in discordant cadence at each laborious footfall; but he carries his weight, that is the great point—he carries a great deal of it, and he carries it remarkably well—an example of humility and patience to the Christian who employs him,

an object of comparison, not much in favour of the latter, between the votaries of the Crescent and the Cross.

When I protest, however, against making a display and a grievance of the load you have to bear, I am far from maintaining that you are to keep it a profound secret, and hide it away in unsuitable places under your clothes. A man can carry a hundredweight on his shoulders with less inconvenience than a few pounds about his heart. If you doubt this, order cold plum-pudding for luncheon, and you will be convinced! A secret, too, is always a heavy substance to take abroad with you, and your own seems to incommode you more than another's, probably because you are less indifferent about letting it fall. As for attempting to dance lightly along with the jaunty air of an unweighted novice, be assured the effort is not only painful but ridiculous. No!

Never be ashamed of your burden, not even though your own folly should have clapped an additional half-hundred on the top of it. Get your shoulders well under the heaviest part, walk as upright as you may, but do not try to swagger; and if you have a friend who likes you well enough to give his assistance, let him catch hold at one end, and so between you move on with it the best way you can.

Some packages grow all the lighter, like a contraband trunk at the Douane, for being weighed and examined, or, as our neighbours call it, "pierced and plumbed." Some again gather increased proportions when we enlarge upon them; but it is only those of which we dare not speak, those which no friend must seem to see, for which no brother must offer a hand, that sink our failing strength, that crush us down humbled and helpless in the mire.

There is but one place for such burdens as these, and we never lay them there till we have tried everything else in vain; just as we offer the remnants of a life from which we expect no more pleasure, where we ought to have given all the promise and vigour of our youth, or take an aching, hopeless, worn-out heart back to our only friend, as the crying child runs to its parent with a broken toy.

> "The ox toils through the furrow,
> Obedient to the goad;
> The patient ass up flinty paths
> Plods with its weary load,"

says Macaulay in his glorious "Lays of Ancient Rome," and something in the nature of both these animals fits them especially for the endurance of labour and the imposition of weight. It is well for a man when he has a little of the bovine repose of character, a good deal of the asinine thickness of skin and insensibility to hard usage,

Such a disposition toils on contentedly enough, obedient indeed to the goad so far as moderately to increase the staid solemnity of his gait, taking the flinty path and the weary load as necessary conditions of life, with a serene equanimity for which he has the philosophical example of the ass! The ways are rough, you know, and the journey long. Depend upon it these animals arrive at its termination with less wear and tear, more safety, and even more despatch, than the sensitive, high-spirited, and courageous horse, wincing from the lash, springing to the voice, striving, panting, sweating, straining every muscle to get home.

In the parable of the "Ancient Mariner" —for is it not indeed the wildest, dreamiest, and most poetical of parables?—you remember the hopelessness of the weight he carried when

> "Instead of the cross the albatross
> About his neck was hung."

It was not his misfortune, you see, but his crime that bore him down. Its consciousness lay far heavier on his spirit than did his after-punishment, when, weary and desolate, he wailed that he was

> "Alone, alone, all, all alone,
> Alone on a wide, wide sea,
> And never a saint took pity on
> My soul in agony."

The saints, indeed, might not have heard him; how do we know about that? but he *was* heard nevertheless, and thus he got rid of his burden to raise his head once more in the face of heaven.

He looked upon beauty, nature, animate life, the wonders of the deep, the creatures of his Maker, and "blessed them unaware!"

Enough. The hideous dream vanishes, the unholy spell is broken, and he cries exulting,

"That self-same moment I could pray,
And from my neck so free
The albatross fell off, and sunk
Like lead into the sea."

I sometimes think that women bear their burdens with less apparent struggle, less toil or complaint, than men; and this although they own more of the horse's anxious temperament than the sluggish nature of the ox and the ass. If they have less "nerve" than ourselves—less of the coolness which springs from constitutional insensibility to danger—they have more of that mettlesome spirit which is sometimes called "pluck," that indomitable courage which acknowledges no failure for defeat, which never sleeps upon its post, which can bear up bravely even against the sickness and depression of unremitting pain. It is proverbial that in all phases of mere bodily suffering they show twice the patience and twice the fortitude of the stronger sex;

while who shall say how much of silent sorrow they can cherish and conceal in troubled hearts while they go about their daily business with smiles on their gentle faces, with a tranquil, staid demeanour seeming to chant in soft, harmonious cadence the watchword of All's Well!

Do you not think they, too, keep their favourite skeletons (far less perfect than yourself) hoarded, hidden away, locked up, but not to be buried or forgotten for the worth of kingdoms? Do you suppose they never bring them out to be hugged, and fondled, and worshipped, and wept over?—

"In the dead unhappy night, and when the rain is on the roof."

Bah! It is a world of shams. If a woman is not a hypocrite she must be a stone!

We should give them greater credit though could we learn more of the weights they have to carry. But their training is

known only to themselves; their trials come off in secret; the saddles they wear are jealously locked up, and they take care to keep the key! I think the reason they run so kindly is that they apply themselves very frequently to the last resource of the Ancient Mariner when he saw no escape from his punishment, when he was overweighted with his curse.

I know not: I only know that the quiet courage, the generous spirit, the untiring endurance with which they perform the journey of life is too generally ignored, unappreciated, and thrown away. How often have we not seen a thorough-bred horse ridden by a butcher? a being little lower than an angel submitting, gentle and patient, to a creature little higher than a brute.

CHAPTER XI.

SHADOWS.

"COMING events cast their shadows before," says a favourite adage of that proverbial philosophy which is often so quaint and truthful, sometimes so contradictory and far-fetched. In the present instance the maxim, I think, is contradicted by our individual convictions and general experience. For my own part I protest I am no believer in presentiments. That is a beautiful fiction of poetry, completely unsubstantiated by the prosaic events of life, which

represents the predestined sufferer as one who

"Still treads the shadow of his foe,"

while the arm of the avenger, uplifted though unseen, intercepts the light of heaven ere yet its blow descends. Poets, no doubt, lay their foundations on a basis of truth, but, as befits their profession, do not scruple to raise a superstructure in magnificent disproportion to the limits of their ground-plan. I will appeal to nine people out of every ten whose lot it has been to sustain severe affliction—and I think that is nearly nine-tenths of the human race—whether they have not found themselves staggered or prostrated by blows as sudden as they were overwhelming; whether the dagger has not always been a more deadly weapon than the sword, the marksman behind the hedge a more fatal enemy than the battery on its eminence, the hidden reef a worse disaster than the adverse gale,

and whether their hopes, their happiness, or their fortunes, have not failed them at the very moment when the false waves smiled serenely at the calm skies overhead—

> "Like ships that on a summer sea
> Have gone down sailing tranquilly."

No; these forthcoming shadows need not disturb our repose. They owe their origin neither to heart nor brain, but proceed from liver, and I should think must be quite unknown to him who "lives on sixpence a day and earns it!"

What a life we should lead if we could look an inch before our noses! Of all curses to humanity the bitterest would be the gift of foresight. I often think a man's progress towards his grave is like that of a sculler labouring up-stream, we will say from Richmond to Teddington Lock. By taking the established and conventional course he avoids collision with his kind and proceeds in com-

parative safety By certain side-glances and general knowledge of the river, which we may compare to the warnings of experience and the reasonings of analogy, he obtains an inkling, far removed from certainty, of much approaching trouble to which his back is turned. By observing the track of his own boat rippling the surface many a yard astern, he learns to guide his course, just as he would correct his conduct by the lessons of the past. Now the stream runs hard against him, and he must work his way foot by foot with honest, unremitting toil. Now he shoots along through slack water, much to his own content and self-approval, but under no circumstances, however formidable, must he completely relax his efforts, for the current would soon float him back to the place from whence he came. Many a scene of beauty, many a lovely nook, and sunny lawn, and fairy palace glides by him as he

goes—fading, vanishing, shut out by the intervening point, to leave but a memory of their attractions, dispelled in turn by ever-recurring beauties of meadow, wood, and water.

So he plods steadily on, accepting the labour, enjoying the pleasures of his trip, and nearing with every stroke the haven he is to reach at last.

However healthy and invigorating the toil, however varied and delightful the passage, I think he will not be sorry to arrive at Teddington Lock, there to ship his oars, moor his boat under the willows, and so, lulled by the murmur of the ever-flowing waters, with folded arms, up-turned face, and eyes wandering drowsily heavenwards, fall peacefully asleep.

But the shadows which cross our path to our greatest deception and detriment are those for which we so willingly abandon the

substances whereof they are but the fading phantoms, as the dog in the fable dropped a piece of meat out of his jaws to snatch a like morsel from the other dog he saw reflected in the water. Every day men grasp at clouds as did Ixion, bartering eagerly for that which they know to be illusive the solid joys and advantages of life. How many people in the possession of sufficient incomes deprive themselves of common comfort in an attempt to appear richer and more liberal than they really are! How many forego the society of friends in which they find honest pleasure for that of mere acquaintances with whom they have scarce a thought in common, because the latter, perhaps themselves sacrificed to the same illusion, move in a higher and more ostentatious class of society! With one the shadow is a reputation for wealth, with another for taste. Here it is a house in Belgravia, there a villa

on the Thames; sometimes a position in the county, a seat in parliament, or a peerage long dormant in a race of squires.

Whatever it may be the pursuer follows it at the best speed he can command, finding, usually, that the faster he goes the faster it flies before him; and when he comes up with it at last to enfold the phantom in his longing embrace, behold! it crumbles away to disappointment in his very arms.

I have seen Cerito dancing her famous shadow-dance; I have watched a child following its own retreating figure, lengthened to gigantic proportions in an afternoon sun, with shouts of wonder and delight; I once observed, perhaps the prettiest sight of the three, a thorough-bred foal gallop up to some park-palings, to wince and scour away from the distorted representation of a race-horse it met there, in the wild, graceful freedom of a yet unbridled youth; and I have thought

of the many shadows that lure us all, between the cradle and the grave, only to impose on us in their fullest signification the different sentiments of disbelief, dis-illusion, and disgust. When Peter Schlemihl made his ill-advised bargain with the devil, that shrewd purchaser quietly rolled up his victim's shadow and put it in his own pocket. When Michael Scott, in the completion of his education at Padua, had mastered certain intricacies of the black art, his fellow-students observed to their consternation that while they walked in the college gardens with the wise north countryman,

> "His form no darkening shadow cast
> Athwart the sunny wall."

The first step in supernatural learning, the first condition for the attainment of superhuman power, seems to have been the dismissal of so inconvenient and unmeaning an appurtenance as a shadow.

How many people have I known, and these not the least endearing and capable of their kind, over whose whole lives the shadow of a memory, though growing fainter day by day, has yet been dark enough to throw a gloom that the warmest rays of friendship and affection were powerless to dispel! Sometimes, indeed, that darkness seems dearer to them than the glories of the outer world; sometimes, and this is the hardest fate of all, they cling to it the closer that they feel the illusion has been to them a more reliable possession than the reality. There is a world of tender longing, bitter experience, and sad, suggestive pathos in Owen Meredith's lament—

"How many a night 'neath her window have I walked in the wind and the rain,
Only to look on her shadow fleet over the lighted pane!
Alas! 'twas the shadow that rested—'twas *herself* that fleeted, you see—
And now I am dying—I know it! Dying—and where is she?"

The shadow he had worshipped so fondly was not more fleeting than the dream on which he had anchored a man's honest hopes, and wasted a man's generous, unsuspecting heart.

Then we see our shadows at points of view so peculiar to ourselves, in lights that so distort and disguise their proportions, it is no wonder if for us they become phantoms of formidable magnitude and overpowering aspect. The demon of the Hartz Mountains is said to be nothing more than the reflection or shadow of the traveller's own person, as seen under certain abnormal conditions of refraction against a morning or evening sky. Such demons most of us keep of our own, and we take care never to look at them but at the angle which magnifies them out of all reasonable proportions. When you see mine and I yours, each of us is surprised at the importance attached to his spectral illusion

by the other. Yours seems to me a diminutive and contemptible little devil enough; and doubtless, although you never may have entertained a high opinion of my mental powers or moral force of character, both are fallen fifty per cent. in your estimation since you have been brought face to face with the bugbear by which they are overridden and kept down. If we could but change shadows we should both of us get back into the sun. Alas! that all the magic art of Michael Scott himself would fail to effect such a trick of legerdemain. Alas! that we must bear as best we can, each for himself, the gloomy presence that makes us so dull of cheer, so sad of countenance, and so cold about the heart.

Men adopt a great many different methods to get rid of their respective shadows, approximating more or less to the conclusive plan of Peter Schlemihl aforesaid, who

sold his outright to the devil. Some try to lose it amongst a crowd of fellow-creatures, all with the same familiar attendants of their own; others struggle with it in solitude, and find themselves halting and maimed after the conflict, like him who wrestled of old with the angel at Penuel "until the breaking of the day." One thinks to stifle his tormentor in business, another to lull him with pleasure, a third to drown him in wine. None of these remedies seem to answer the purpose desired. Blue-books, bankers' books, betting-books are unable to break the spell; over the pages of each he throws the all-pervading gloom. Neither is he to be worsted by the gleam of many candles flashing only less brightly than the sparkle of Beauty's jewels and the lustre of her soft eyes in "halls of dazzling light." On the contrary, it is here that, may be from the force of contrast, he

asserts his power with the greatest determination, coming out, as is but natural, under the vivid glare thrown on him in a stronger and more uncompromising relief. To steep him in wine is often but to increase his dimensions out of all reasonable proportions, and at best only gets rid of him for a night that he may return in the morning refreshed and invigorated to vindicate his sovereignty over the enfeebled rebel he controls. There are means of dispelling the darkness, no doubt, but I fear they are not to be found in the resources of study, certainly not in the distractions of dissipation nor the feverish delirium of vice. It must be a warm, genial, and unusually generous disposition which is not warped and dwarfed by a shadow cast upon it in youth, or indeed at any period of life; but for animate as for inanimate nature there are black frosts as well as white. The latter evaporate with

the morning sun in light wreaths of vapour and perhaps a few tears sparkling like diamonds, to be succeeded by brilliant sunshine, unclouded till the close of its short winter's day; the former, grim, grey, and lowering, parch and wither up the life of every green thing, drawing her shroud, as it were, over the cold, dead face of earth ere she is buried in the darkness of approaching night.

It is hard upon youth to see its rosy morning overcast by the shadow; but it has many hours yet to look forward to before noon, and can afford to wait for brighter weather. Far more cruelly does age feel the withdrawal of that light it had trusted in to cheer its declining day; a light it can never hope to welcome again, because long ere the shadow shall be withdrawn from the chilled and weary frame, its sun will have gone down for ever into the ocean of eternity.

People talk a great deal about that physical impossibility which they are pleased to term "a broken heart;" and the sufferer who claims their sympathy under such an abnormal affliction is invariably a young person of the gentler sex. I have no doubt in my own mind, nevertheless, that a severe blow to the fortunes, the self-esteem, the health, or the affections, is far more severely felt after forty than before thirty; and yet who ever heard of an elderly gentleman breaking his heart? Anything else you please, his word, his head, his waistcoat-strings, or even his neck, but his heart! Why, the assumption is ludicrous. If you consult the statistics of suicide, however, you will be suprised to find in how many instances this most reckless of crimes is committed by persons of mature age, though it is strange that those whose span in the course of nature is likely to be so short

should think it worth while to curtail it with their own hand. There is another shadow, too, which, apart from all finer feelings of the heart or intellect, has a pernicious effect on our interests and welfare. It is cast by our own opaque substances when we persist in an inconvenient attitude, commonly called "standing in our own light." Parents and guardians, those who have the care of young people, generally are well aware of its irritating persistency and disagreeable consequences. It is provoking to find all your efforts thwarted by the very person on whose behalf they are made. After much trouble, and the eating of more dirt than you can digest in comfort, you obtain for a lad a high stool in a counting-house, an appointment to the Indian army, or a berth in a Chinese merchantman, fondly hoping that in one way or another he is provided for, and off your

hands at last. But after a while behold him back again, like a consignment of damaged goods! He has been too fast for the clerkship, too idle for the army, not sober enough for the sea. With a fine chance and everything in his favour, he "stood in his own light," and must abide by the gloom he has himself made. Or perhaps, though this is a rarer case, because women's perceptions of their own interest are usually very keen, it is your Blanche, or your Rose, or your Violet who thus disappoints the magnificent expectations you have founded on her beauty, her youth, her eyes, her figure, and her general fascinations. The peer with his unencumbered estate and his own personal advantages would have proposed to a certainty, was only waiting for an opportunity—he told his sister so—when that last ten minutes at croquet with Tom, those half-dozen extra

rounds in the cotillon with Harry, scared this shy bird from the decoy, and he went off to Melton in disgust. Rose, Blanche, or Violet "stood in her own light," and must be content for the rest of her career to burn tallow instead of wax.

The shadows, however, which ladies preserve for their own private annoyance cast surprisingly little gloom over their pretty persons while they are before the world. A new dress, a coming ball, a race-meeting, or a picnic, are sufficient to dispel them at a moment's notice; and though doubtless when these palliatives are exhausted, when they put their candles out at night, the darkness gathers all the thicker for its lucid interval of distraction, it is always something to have got rid of it even for an hour.

That women feel very keenly, nobody who knows anything about them can doubt.

That they feel very *deeply* is a different question altogether. In some rare instances they may indeed be found, when the light they love is quenched, to sit by preference in darkness for evermore; but as a general rule the feminine organization is thoroughly appreciative of the present, somewhat forgetful of the past, and exceedingly reckless of the future.

For both sexes, however, there must in their course through life be shadows deep in proportion to the brilliancy of the sunshine in which they bask. "Shall we receive good at the hand of God," says Job, "and shall we not receive evil?" thereby condensing into one pithy sentence perhaps the profoundest system of philosophy ever yet submitted to mankind. The evil always seems to us greater than the good, the shadows more universal than the sunshine; but with how little reason we need only

reflect for a moment to satisfy ourselves. There is a gleam in which we often fondly hope to dispel our shadows, delusive as the "will-o'-the-wisp," a light "that never yet was seen on sea or shore," which is cruelly apt to lure us on reefs and quicksands, to guide us only to eventual shipwreck; but there is also a glimmer, faint and feeble here, yet capable of dispelling the darkest shadows that ever cross our path, which if we will only follow it truthfully and persistently for a very brief journey, shall cheer us heartily and guide us steadfastly till it widens and brightens into the glory of eternal day.

CHAPTER XII.

GUINEVERE.

AMONGST all the works of our great poet, works in which criticism, searching diligently for flaws, discovers every day new beauties, surely this noble poem is the very crown and masterpiece.

Compared even with the productions of his own genius, Guinevere always seems to me like a statue in the midst of oil-paintings. So lofty is it in conception, so grand in treatment, so fair, so noble, so elevating, and yet so real. As the Californian digger in his

"prospect" washes, and sifts, and searches, till from a mass of rubbish and impurities he separates the nugget of virgin ore, so from the lavish confusion of rich material to be found in that collection of early romance called "La Morte d'Arthur," the Laureate has wrought out a poem precious in its own intrinsic merit as the purest metal that was ever beaten into a crown of gold. One other has been over the same ground before him, the great magician who with a wave of his wand has created for us gleaming blade and glittering hauberk, mail and plate, and managed steeds caparisoned, lances shivered to the grasp, sweet pale faces looking down on the mimic war beneath, and all the pomp, panoply, and *prestige* of an ideal chivalry, when

> "The champions, armed in martial sort,
> Have thronged into the list,
> And but three knights of Arthur's court
> Are from the tourney missed.

> And still those lovers' fame survives
> For faith so constant shown;
> There were two that loved their neighbours' **wives,**
> And one that loved his own."

Alas! that the very first of these in arms, in courtesy, in personal advantages, and, but for the one foul blot, in honourable fame, should have been Lancelot de Lac, the ornament of chivalry. Alas! that the lady of his guilty love should have been that

> " Flower of all the west and all the world,"

whose rightful place was on the bosom of " the stainless king."

Their fatal passion, that grew so insensibly in those fair May-days, long ago, when the pair

> " Rode under groves that looked a paradise
> Of blossom, over sheets of hyacinth,
> That seemed the heavens upbreaking thro' the earth,"

has struck root now, deep, deep in the hearts of both, and spreading like the deadly upas-

tree, has blighted every other sentiment and affection beneath its shade. There is no happiness for Lancelot without Guinevere, no sweetness in the breath of evening nor speculation in the stars of night, no gladness in the summer, no glamour in the greenwood, no glory in the day Her whisper lurks in the hollow of his helmet when he shouts his war-cry, her image rouses his desire for fame, and points his trusty lance. But for the keen, unholy stimulant his arm would be nerveless and his courage dull, while all the time

> "The great and guilty love he bare the queen,
> In battle with the love he bare his lord,
> Hath marred his face, and marked it ere his time."

Yes, there is retribution even here for the sweet, seductive sin. "The worm that dieth not, the fire that is not quenched," begin their work long ere the cup has been emptied of its tempting poison; and the one gnaws

fiercer, the other burns deeper, in proportion to the capability of good from which the sinner has fallen—in proportion to the truth and tenderness of the tortured heart that seems meant for better things.

And Guinevere. Who can fathom that woman's anguish, her shame, her self-reproach, her bitter, hopeless remorse, for whom the holy plighted love that should have made her shield, her honour, and her happiness through life, has been pierced, and shattered, and defiled by that other love which drags her to perdition, and to which she yet clings closer and closer with a warped instinct of womanly fidelity for the very sorrow and suffering it entails? The sense of personal degradation is perhaps the least of her punishment, for it is her nature when she loves to merge her own identity in another; but what of her children, if she have any? How can she bear the clear,

guileless faces, the little hands clasped in prayer on her knee, the loving, trustful eyes of those simple believers to whom she, the sinner, is in the place of God? Many a woman, hesitating and hovering on the very brink of ruin, has been withheld by the tiny clasp of an infant's hand. If that last chance should have failed her, such failure has been ever after the heaviest and least endurable of the penalties she has brought on herself.

But she may be childless, she may be spared the bitter pain of estrangement from those who are indeed part and parcel of her being. What, then, of her husband? The man whom once she believed she loved, who has cherished her, trusted her, given up for her sake many of the realities and all the illusions of life, whose care has surrounded her so constantly, every day and all day long, that, like the air she breathes, she can only be made sensible of its existence when

withdrawn, whose indulgence was perhaps so unvaried as to escape notice, whose affection, expressed by deeds, not words, she has forgotten because it has not been repeated, like that other love, in burning whispers every hour. So she not only strikes him a deadly blow, such as his bitterest enemy would scarce deal in fair fight, but poisons her weapon besides, and leaves it sticking in the wound to burn and rankle and fester, that every passing hand in careless jest or wanton outrage may inflict on him mortal agony at will. Once perhaps she was proud of that brave, kind face, which she could not imagine blanched by fear nor clouded with shame. Can she bear to think of it now, quivering at the chance allusion of every idle tongue, warped into agony, like that of a man shot through the lungs, when her own name is spoken, purposely or otherwise, by some impertinent gossip or some rancorous,

ungenerous foe? His sorrow has become a jest; that offence will soon pass away to make room for fresher scandal. His home is broken up; he can make himself another. The woman he loved has left him, yet there are plenty more as fond and fair ready to pity and console; but his trust is broken, and not even in an angel from heaven can he believe again. This is the worst injury of all. The strongest, the purest, the noblest of earthly motives to well-doing has failed him, and from henceforth the man is but a lamp without a light, a watch without a mainspring, a body without a soul. It is well for him now if he have some lofty aspiration, some great and generous object, to lift him out of his depth of sorrow, to rouse him from his apathy of despair. Thus only can he wrestle with the demon that has entered into his heart, thus only cast him out and, trampling on him, so rise to a

higher sphere than that from which he has been dragged down. In self-sacrifice and self-devotion he shall find the talisman to set him free, not at once, but, like other permanent results, gradually and in the lapse of time; so, mounting step by step and gaining strength as he ascends, he shall look down from the unassailable heights of forgiveness on the lesser souls that can never reach to wound him now—forgiveness, free, complete, and unconditional as that which he himself pleads for from his God.

And here it is that the character of Arthur, as drawn by Tennyson, exemplifies the noblest type of Christianity, chivalry, and manhood with which we are acquainted in the whole range of fiction. Poetry has yet to disclose to us a more godlike, more elevating sentiment than the king's pardon to his guilty and repentant wife. It breathes the very essence of all those qualities which

humanity, at best "a little lower than the angels," is ever striving unsuccessfully to attain. There is courage, abiding by the award of its own conscience and appealing to a higher tribunal than the verdict of its kind; there is contempt for consequences; there is scrupulous, unswerving persistence in the path of duty, such as constitutes the soldier and the hero; there is large-hearted, far-seeing benevolence, that weighs its own crushed happiness and blighted life but as dust in the balance against the well-being of its fellows. Above all, there is that grand trust in a better world and an immortal identity, without which man, despite his strength of will and pride of intellect, were little superior to the beasts of the field. Such is the diapason, so to speak, of this mighty march of feeling—the march of an unconquered spirit and a kingly soul; while through it all, ever present, though ever

modulated and kept down, runs the wild, mournful accompaniment, the wail of a kindly, tortured heart, of a love that can never die—

"And in thy bowers of Camelot or of Usk
Thy shadow still would glide from room to room,
And I should evermore be vext with thee,
In hanging robe—or vacant ornament,
Or ghostly footfall echoing on the stair.
For think not, though thou wouldst not love thy lord,
Thy lord has wholly lost his love for thee.
I am not made of such slight elements.
Yet must I leave thee, woman, to thy shame."

How wonderful, how exhaustive, and how practical seems the familiarity of great poets with the niceties and workings of the human heart! It has been said of them, prettily enough, that

"They learn in suffering what they teach in song."

God forbid! If it were so, their lot would indeed be unenviable; and what an eternity of torture would such a genius as Byron, or Shelley, or Tennyson himself have

condensed into a single life! No, theirs must be rather the intuitive knowledge that springs from sympathy with all things, animate and inanimate, in summer and winter, in light and darkness, in sorrow and in joy —a sympathy receiving freely as it gives, and thus cozening them out of nine-tenths of their own private sorrows, which such finer temperaments as theirs would otherwise be too sensitive to endure.

The wide scope of this sympathy, the facility with which genius can handle extreme contrasts of the same passion with equal skill, is, I think, finely exemplified in the two poems of "Maud" and "Guinevere." I have already compared the latter to an exquisite piece of sculpture. The former seems to me like a wild, fanciful, highly-coloured painting, in which some true artist has striven to embody the unattainable conceptions of a dream. Was ever colouring

mixed on palette more vivid and glowing than this description of a lover waiting for his mistress in her garden :—

"There falls a splendid tear
From the passion-flower at the gate;
She is coming—my love—my dear!
She is coming—my life, my fate!
The red rose cries, She is near—she is near!
The white rose weeps,—She is late!
The larkspur listens,—I hear—I hear!
And the lily whispers,—I wait!"

Is there not in these lines, besides grace, sentiment, pathos, tenderness, a wealth of pictorial fancy, such as Landseer himself has not outdone in his magical representation of clown and elves and stars and flowers grouped round Titania in Fairyland?

As in "clear-faced Arthur" is rendered the ideal dignity of love, so in Maud's hapless suitor we find exemplified its mad enthusiasm and passion. With both, self is unhesitatingly sacrificed to the welfare of another. When the fatal shot has been fired,

and the exile faces a foreign shore in utter hopelessness that he shall ever look on the face he loves again, the pity for himself that cannot but chill his sorrowing heart merges in anxiety and tenderness for Maud. Even now—perhaps now more than ever—in grief, danger, and privation, his first thought flies to the idol for whom he has built his life into a throne, that she may reign there unrivalled and supreme. May *his* be the shame, the sorrow, and the suffering!—such is his wild, pathetic prayer—and let the treasure of his heart go free. If there be danger, let it lower round *his* unprotected head. If there be punishment, let *him* bear it for both! Ay, though she may never reward him for it, never even know it; for in this world these two are surely parted not to meet again. What of that? She is still his queen—his goddess—his love—the aim of his existence, the darling of his care.

"Comfort her, comfort her, all things good,
While I am over the sea;
Let me and my passionate love go by,
But speak to her all things holy and high
Whatever happen to me.
Me and my harmful love go by,
But come to her waking, or find her asleep,
Powers of the height, powers of the deep,
And comfort her though I die."

Surely this is the pure, unadulterated metal. Alas! that it should sometimes lack the glitter of that counterfeit which women grasp at so eagerly in preference to the true gold. So, in extremity of danger, shattered in battle against the chosen friend and comrade whose treachery was only less galling to his noble heart than the disloyalty of his queen, beset by

"The godless hosts
Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern sea,"

stern old foes of himself and Christendom, erst by prowess of that "glorious company,"

"The Table Round,
In twelve great battles ruining overthrown,"

now panting for reprisal and revenge, menaced with open rebellion by a sister's son, his army melting, his adherents failing, his sceptre sliding from his grasp, Arthur can yet provide tenderly and carefully for her safety who has brought down on him all this shame, ruin, and defeat.

"And many more when Modred raised revolt,
Forgetful of their troth and fealty, clave
To Modred, and a remnant stays with me.
And of this remnant will I leave a part—
True men who love me still, for whom I live—
To guard thee in the wild hour coming on;
Lest but a hair of this low head be harmed.
Fear not: thou shalt be guarded till my death."

Well might the Queen, when he had passed from her sight for ever, reflect bitterly on the comparative merits of lover and husband, having, like all such women, proved to extremity of torture the devotion of both.

"I wanted warmth and colour, which I found
In Lancelot. Now I see thee what thou art—
Thou art the highest, and most human, too,
Not Lancelot, nor another."

Could she but have seen him as he really was in the golden days long ago, when her court formed the centre of all that was bravest and fairest in the world of Christendom, when her life seemed one long holiday of dance and revel in the lighted halls of Camelot, of tilt and tournament and pageantry of mimic war, held in honour of her own peerless beauty, in the Lists of Caerleon, of horn and hound and rushing chase and willing palfrey speeding over the scented moors of Cornwall, or through the sunny glades of Lyonesse, of sweet May mornings when she went forth fresh and lovely, fairer than the very smile of spring, amongst her courtiers, all

"Green-suited, but with plumes that mocked the may,"

to walk apart, nevertheless, with flushing

cheek and eyes cast down, while she listened to *his* whispers, whose voice was softer and sweeter than fairy music in her ears! Could she but have known then where to seek her happiness and find it! Alas! that we see things so differently in different lights and surroundings — in serge and velvet, in the lustre of revelry and the pale cold grey of dawn, in black December frosts and the rich glow of June. Alas! for us, that so seldom till too late to take our bearings, and avoid impending shipwreck, can we make use of that fearful gift described by another great poet as

> "The telescope of truth,
> Which strips the distance of its fantasies,
> And brings life near, in utter nakedness,
> Making the cold reality too real!"

but still *reality*, and, as such, preferable to all the baseless visions of fancy, all the glitter and glamour and illusion of romance.

We mortals must have our dreams; doubtless it is for a good purpose that they are so fair and sweet, that their duration is so short, the waking from them so bitter and forlorn. But at last most of us find ourselves disenchanted, weary, hopeless, memory-haunted, and seeking sanctuary after all, like Guinevere, when Lancelot had gone

> "Back to his land, but she to Almesbury
> Fled all night long by glimmering waste and weald,
> And heard the spirits of the waste and weald
> Moan as she fled, or thought she heard them moan,—
> And in herself she moaned—'Too late! too late!'"

What a picture of desolation and despair! Mocking phantoms all about her, now gibing, now pitying, now goading her to the recklessness of despair. Before her, darkness uncheered by a single beacon; behind her, the sun of life and love gone down to rise no more, and, lifting helpless, hopeless eyes above,

> "A blot in heaven, the raven flying high."

Deep must be the guilt for which such hours as these are insufficient to atone!

But the queen's penance hath only just begun, for the black drop is not yet wrung out of her heart, and even in her cloister at Almesbury it is remorse rather than repentance that drives the iron into her soul. As it invariably does in moments of extreme feeling, the master-passion takes possession of her once more, and "my Lancelot" comes back in all his manly beauty and his devoted tenderness, so touching and so prized, that for him too it must make the sorrow of a life-time. Again, she sees him in the lists, best, bravest, and knightliest lance of all the Round Table. Again, sitting fair and courtly and gentle among dames in hall, his noble face none the less winsome, be sure, to *her*, for that she could read on it the stamp of sorrow set there by herself as her own indelible seal.

Again she tastes the bitter torture of their parting agony, and her very spirit longs only to be released that it may fly to him for ever, far away in his castle beyond the sea.

This, with true dramatic skill, is the moment chosen by the poet for the arrival of her injured, generous, and forgiving lord—

> "While she brooded thus,
> And grew half guilty in her thoughts again,
> There rode an armed warrior to the doors."

And now comes that grand scene of sorrow and penitence and pardon, for which this poem seems to me unequalled and alone.

Standing on the brink of an uncertainty more ghastly than death, for something tells him that he is now to lead his hosts in his last battle, and that the unearthly powers to whom he owes birth, fame, and kingdom,

are about to reclaim him for their own, he stretches the hands of free forgiveness, as it were, from the other world.

How short, in the face of doom so imminent, so inevitable, appears that span of life, in which so much has been accomplished! Battles have been fought, victories gained, a kingdom established, a bulwark raised against the heathen, an example set to the whole of Christendom, and yet it seems but yesterday

> "They found a naked child upon the sands
> Of wild Dundagil by the Cornish sea,
> And that was Arthur."

Now in the height of glory, in the fulfilment of duty, in the prime of manhood, such sorrows have overtaken him, as must needs whisper their prophetic warning that his task is done, and it is time to go. *Where*, he sees not, cares not. True to himself and his knighthood, he is ready now, as always, to

follow the path of honour, wherever it may lead, and meet unflinching

> "Death, or I know not what mysterious doom."

Arthur, dethroned, ruined, heart-broken, mortally wounded, and unhorsed, will be no less Arthur than when on Badon Hill he stood

> "High on a heap of slain, from spur to plume,
> Red as the rising sun with heathen blood,"

and shouted victory with a great voice in the culminating triumph of his glory.

For him too at this supreme moment the master-passion asserts its sway, and even that great soul thrills to its centre with the love that has been wasted for half a life-time on her who is only now awaking to a consciousness of its worth. He cannot leave her for ever without bidding farewell to his guilty queen. So riding through the misty night to the convent where she has taken

refuge, he looks his last in this world on her from whom in his great loyalty of affection neither her past disgrace nor his own approaching death shall part him for ever. With that instinct of pure love which clings to a belief in its eternity, he charges her to cleanse her soul with repentance and sustain her hopes with faith, that

> "Hereafter in that world where all are pure
> We two may meet before high God, and thou
> Wilt spring to me, and claim me thine, and know
> I am thine husband."

Thus, with all his soul flowing to his lips, this grand heroic nature blesses the guilty woman, grovelling in the dust, and moves off stately and unflinching to confront the doom of Fate.

Then, true to the yearning nature of her sex, yearning ever with keenest longings for the lost and the impossible, Guinevere leaps to her feet, the tide of a new love welling up in her wayward heart, fierce, cruel, and irre-

sistible because it must be henceforth utterly hopeless and forlorn. With her own hand she has put away her own happiness; and what happiness it might have been she feels too surely, now that no power on earth can ever make it hers again!

Oh! for one word more from the kind, forgiving voice! Oh! for one look in the brave, clear, guileless face! But no. It is never to be. Never, never more! She rushes indeed to the casement, but Arthur is already mounted and bending from the saddle, to give directions for *her* safety and *her* comfort.

> "So she did not see the face,
> Which then was as an angel, but she saw—
> Wet with the mists and smitten by the lights—
> The dragon of the great Pendragon-ship
> Blaze, making all the night a steam of fire.
> And even then he turned; and more and more
> The moony vapours rolling round the king,
> Who seemed the phantom of a giant in it,
> Enwound him, fold by fold, and made him gray
> And grayer, till himself became as mist
> Before her, moving ghostlike to his doom."

"I think I like it better without your explanations and remarks," observed Bones. "There is a proverb, my friend, about 'refined gold,' and 'the lily,' that you would do well to remember. Hang it! man, do you think nobody understands or appreciates poetry but yourself?"

Perhaps I have over-aired him lately; but it seems to me that Bones is a good deal "above himself." If I can only get him back into the cupboard, I have more than half a mind to lock him up for good and all.

THE END.

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